A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

By

FREDERICK NIVEN

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A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

TUBAL: *One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.*

SHYLOCK: *Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal. It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.*

A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

By FREDERICK NIVEN

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TO

HOLBROOK JACKSON

My excellent friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a city which is very great and very famous for wisdom and power of mind; are you not ashamed of caring so much for the making of money, and for reputation, and for honour? Will you not care or think about wisdom, and truth, and the perfection of your soul?

If any man have two loaves, let him sell one and buy of the white narcissus; for the one is food for the body and the other is food for the soul.

He who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS

I

BLISS HENRY took train at Euston, had his ticket punched, and then let the world wag till he was travelling on a winding, single line far from the network of rails at Euston, the carriage window open to the upland air, fields of purple wavering past, with blue and grey rocks jutting up amidst them; and corried, crannied mountains, with birds and mists wavering athwart them, delighting him with their wildness; and, where the moors fanned out more widely, little pools and tarns lying like brazen shields or fallen suns. Or suddenly would come a hissing to the ears, a flash of white to the eyes; the rattle of the train would be lulled a moment, crossing a foaming river, and when the rattle leapt to life again there was a new picture in his heart, of a blue and brown river foaming into white over a linn, with a swirling pool below, and a long, glossy smoothness above, before the leap, where trees stood up dreamily against the afternoon sky; a quick vision of golden

flakes of sun, and green flakes of leaves, and flakes of light and shadow under the trees that went down to a little sweep of gleaming pebbles.

Then came the little junction town near the river's mouth (smelling jointly of fish and agriculture), and the change of trains; and Bliss Henry (you know whom I mean—author of *The Jewelled Snuff-Box* and *The Japanese Fan*) went on upon the last lap through the mellow land to his chosen place, the place out of London in which he was to find peace for his work.

As the landscape glowed and shone past (somewhat leisurely on that particular line), the sinuous railway curving farther into these recesses of peace whence the stream came sparkling, he was more than elated at his escape from London, at his freedom: the wild roses were to him the roses of Waller's and Ronsard's lyrics; the grass, of Parnassus; the stream, of Helicon. For he was free—and he was going away to write another book, the idea for which had long delightfully possessed him. And he carried with him a cheque for £100—enormous sum to a dreamer. He stilled his heart and looked out sanely, as well as intensely, and saw the highland stream swirling down through the quiet day, told himself he was going on holiday, but to work, just as surely as though he were still sitting in his back room in Chelsea; saw the stream

bordered by waving grass, patches of nettles, patches of bracken, with here and there tufts of heather. These wilderness patches ceased wholly here and there, or kept very close to the stream, giving place to patches of wheat or turnip fields. Wheat patches and patches of wilderness went billowing, and the two telegraph wires switchbacked irregularly past.

Bliss Henry took a long breath, gripped himself; he was losing the intoxication of freedom that had filled him rushing out of the glass-covered terminus in London, and tasting now, crawling to Solway by this branch line, its calm. He saw dog-roses and clover and bracken, and loved their names; saw flakes of mica shine in broken parts of the black banks, and was content that it was not gold he saw.

Violet and vine, cedar of Lebanon, onyx, chalcedony indeed! Who was he to sit artificially playing with words, making them exotic, when he had, at hand, the real thing? To a man who said of a wood of firs that it was like a cathedral he had once replied: "Let us keep in the open air. The insides of cathedrals make me long for forests; they stifle me. I am glad to get out of Saint Paul's always, and to see the outside instead; and, if a flutter of pigeons goes up it, their wings help me to imagine a cliff with gulls. You who see the pathos in a 'young lady' saying: 'Oh, how

beautiful these roses are—they are just like wax!' should see that"—and the friend had said: "You are right, Don Henry."

He bent forward closer to the open window. The wind, because of the passage of the train, made a little fluttering and patting there; it fanned his cheeks, and he looked out newly.

He saw a yokel leaning on a scythe, a wain soaring over a hill-crest on a white road; he took a great breath of the magic air. He heard the whir of a reaping machine, the brawling of the stream. He snuffed the air, redolent of peat, of wheat, of roses—of turnips, and the train went winding on, up stream, to Solway, where he was to find peace for his work.

II

AS you have gathered already, our author had a light heart. And he had need of it. Like many authors he had begun to spill ink before the public in Fleet Street; and like many ink-spillers there he had felt that every drop of ink was a new blot on his soul. He must have felt this deeply, for on the day that he sold his first book to a happy publisher for the sum of £40 he gave up Fleet Street—with the anything from £7 7s. a week to £14 14s. a week that it had brought him.

He had no "prospects." He shut himself up in a back room in Chelsea for nine months with that £40 and wrote another book for which he got £60 in advance of royalty, and, as by that time volume number one had gone well, another cheque on it for £40. Hence the £100 that he had now. But he was not going to write his next book in a top back room, smoking in it all day and going out for a walk before bedtime to air it; he was going to the country—like the successful authors we read of in the literary notes in the *Daily Chronicle*.

He was so immensely happy, seeing the moors and the sky, after seeing nothing bright except London sky-signs for so many months, that he wrote a lyric in the train :

"I would go back to my own loved hills
When I am dying,
And die to the old, old voice of rills
Where birds are flying—
Flying and crying over the hills."

III

WELL, here was actual Solway, the place suggested for peace. Here was the platform with the six hotel coaches backed up just outside, and the hotel porters, with the brass names on their caps, loafing over the barrier.

Bliss Henry ran his eye along the caps and selected a name—" The Gamekeeper "—bookishly, I expect, thinking of Richard Jefferies as much as of whirring grouse. Other selections were " Royal," " Smith's Temperance," " Grand View," " Juke's Commercial "—but enough of these meaningless things. There is one thing I am determined this book shall not be—and that is meaningless. My intention is that it shall be—so far from being meaningless—symbolic.

Anti-climax : Our author walked to " The Gamekeeper," and his luggage followed on a trolley, his immediate luggage that is, a suit-case and a valise.

His cheeks tingling with the air that seemed to deify him after the blasé air of London, Bliss Henry went to bed, and to speedy, happy slumber,

at the little hotel. And next morning, over real Scots porridge, with cream in a silver cream-jug, and fresh herrings, with coffee in a silver pot, marmalade, he sat content, at peace, for the time being, with all men.

IV

A GOOD deal of Bliss Henry's success—for he had been successful for a beginner, despite the sums I have mentioned — authorship being as much for glory as for wealth—had been because of his "charm." Every reviewer spoke of his charm. He would never have written a chapter like this one I'm going to write, lest somebody might have thought it vulgar. But it is not really vulgar—as you shall see when you have read it; and, besides, it is the only one of its kind in the book—the only one that, if you skipped it, instead of reading it, you might *fancy* was not beautiful. But it is beautiful. Just see!

"You have rooms to let?" suggested Bliss Henry, standing on the first step of the flight of five that led up to one of the quaint old houses at the top of High Street.

"Come in, sir," said the lady with the dazed eyes who had opened in response to his ring. "Step this way," and she ushered him into the front room, with no apparent scrutiny *en route*.

But just as she curtsied, preparatory to leaving him, a light woke in the centre of her hazed eyes,

shot over him—and he felt that he had been measured. He wondered what her status in the house might be.

"I shall tell Mrs.," she said, and departed silently; the door, silently, almost closed after her.

There was no sound of her departing in the hall; but, then, she made no sound at all. He judged she was gone to tell "Mrs."—and then the door uncannily closed with a tiny click.

It was almost a relief when it opened again with a more exuberant movement and a beaming, buxom lady entered—a short, baggy woman who slopped a bit as she walked to him. She gave him a fling up of her head and almost a laugh in her voice as she said: "How do you do? You want rooms?"

He agreed with a bow.

"Well—this—this is let and the back is let. The flight above is occupied. But if you don't object to the top, ceiling's a little low—but, then, you are nearer the fresh air—up aloft—you know——" she laughed.

"No harm in that," he said. "And I always have open windows."

They moved into the hall as they spoke.

"Then up we go?" she asked, and laid one plump hand on the balustrade and gathered her skirt with the other.

"Yes," said Henry, and nodded, thinking that she gathered her skirt as if she had no refinement, no distinction of touch, plucking her dress to walk upstairs just as she might have plucked a cloth to scrub it on a washing board. He was afraid she would be antipathetic to the turning of the exquisite phrases in his new book.

She rolled her eye on him and then toiled up stairs with a mixture of panting and laughter, showed him the top rooms with an odd mixture of motherliness and coquetry—a little white bedroom, to the back, looking out over chimneys of a back street to the rolling moors; a barish sitting-room with an "enlarged photograph" or two on the walls, to the front.

"I shall have my things sent round from the hotel," he said.

"What hotel?" she asked.

"'The Gamekeeper,'" he said; and she rolled her eye on him. He gave up trying to make out what she thought of "The Gamekeeper." Her eye seemed to do nothing but roll. Perhaps she was not thinking what manner of man it was who chose "The Gamekeeper"; perhaps she was only thinking of her rolling eye.

"I have some other things to follow from town," he said. "When I get settled down I'll write my address and have them forwarded."

So there he decided to settle; but he had difficulty at first, because of the dilatoriness of those responsible in London for the forwarding of the rest of his belongings. This was, nevertheless, not a drawback, after all.

Gradually, as day succeeded day, he began to hear, not to discover, for he was not an inquisitive person, who were the other occupants of the house. A retired military officer (Solway is an *élite* refuge for retired officers) had the whole flat below him; below that (in the room into which he had been ushered when first adventuring into the house), when at home, sat, staring at the wall-paper and twiddling his thumbs, the clerk of the gasworks.

The buxom landlady appeared not again for a week after he took up quarters. He was attended on by the very quiet person he had first seen, a relative whom he liked better than the landlady. She dressed in bombazine, and had the air, he thought, of one who had lived and loved and lost; and then again, at another time, when he was less "romantic," he wondered if, perhaps, she drank, if there, perchance, was the explanation for her eye and her absent manner. Anyhow, he liked her.

One day she said gently, "Colonel very ill, sir."

"I beg your pardon?" he said.

"Colonel very ill," she repeated and, both

her hands at her side in their wonted pendent stillness, she pointed a lean finger to her toes.

"Ah," he said, "the colonel in the flat below?"

"Yes, sir; very ill. Very querulous, sir, when he's ill. Gentleman here before you used to shuffle his feet, and it put the colonel about when he was ill."

"Very unfortunate. Is he ill often?"

"Well, he's a lonely man, sir," she said. "But I'm interfering with you," and she glided out.

"If the old buck is ill," thought Henry, "I'll go quiet"; so he took off his slippers, lest they should creak, and moved in his stocking soles, looking furtively out of the low casement down the High Street, hands in pockets, bent, away up there in the low-ceilinged "top," wondering when his books would arrive, and noting how droll it was to see people from above like this—to see chiefly the tops of their hats and their feet protruding below.

But day succeeded day and the books did not arrive; so Bliss Henry was able to be idle without shame. He went out much, up hill and forth on to the moor a great deal, becoming acquainted with the roads that wandered there. Yet till his books came he did not care to go far afield. Perhaps after they came, after he got them unpacked and all arranged, and his blotter and paper

and pens laid out, he would suddenly think himself oh, such an idiot to have cooped himself up in this old-world house (in stocking soles, for the sake of a sick "colonel" below), peering down the sunlit main street at sound of every cart passing, and would then, having everything round him, say: "Now—we're settled. Now let us go forth and hear the larks in the fields and the peeweeps on the high moors!"

There was something—well, what a serial story-writer might call "sinister" about that house. There was a curious silence about that house. It seemed a discreet, polite silence, a silence of menials cursing under their breaths. One felt it in the subdued hall, and on the quiet stairs, and at the door of the colonel's room.

Beyond that, on Henry's flight, was a kind of airy quietness, a kind of white or crystal quietness due to a little half-curtained window that showed the sky and the crest of the hills.

But sure enough the day came, or the late evening, when the silence was broken, and one knew it an unreal silence, a waiting silence, a kind of silence of people from below stairs.

Of the breaking of the silence I shall tell later; but, first, of the extreme silence:—

Dinner was always promptly served at seven, to Henry, in the hushed front room with the out-

jutting window-seat which he liked. At seven-fifteen the colonel dined. At seven-thirty the gas person on the first floor ate—when he was not, that is, out at the "Royal" bar drinking.

But on this historic night of silence seven came and no dinner—only silence.

Seven-fifteen came—only silence, with the soft feet of the staid relative padding through it—but she did not come so far as the "top." The minutes chased the quiet minutes, the "quarters" followed each other, and several times the soft sound of her slippers whispered on the stairs as though she was now coming higher—then ceased. It was almost uncanny.

Then Henry heard a bell ring wildly away in the bowels of the house.

"Ah," he thought, "the colonel dines after me, and he has lost patience first. Perhaps they'll respect him more."

Then came the soft pad on the stairs again—and ceased.

Henry, for a fact, had no bell; he went out and downstairs a little way, and called; but no answer, not a sound. He went down farther, beyond the colonel's door, and saw the light bubbling in the hall chandelier and its reflection quaking in the varnished wall and on the dead knobs and protuberances of the hat-rack.

Then he went up again and, passing the colonel's door, heard a sound as of a quiet rumpus there, heavy snorting, struggling—and then a bell pealed frantically in the basement.

It did not sound to Henry as if there were no one in. You know the sound of a bell in an untenanted house; I don't mean a vacant, unfurnished house, but in a house that has no one in it. No—he felt that someone stood with a pallid face and fingers locked, looking at that bell swaying, wagging, leaping.

The clatter of it died down and Henry passed on upstairs; but, ere he gained his door, the bell again leapt, and rang again—then tinkled slower, slower, the ringer having a rest; but it stopped not for long, the sound leapt to life yet again—then thinned off.

Henry sat down—and laughed. He had pictured the hot, red colonel swearing over the bell handle.

Then on the flat below he heard: "No, sir, she is not in; no one is in."

At that a very high, mellifluous voice, a voice he liked, said, quite evenly and calmly, without any excited rise: "Well, it is damned nearly nine o'clock, and I should like to know when the —— I am going to get my dinner."

There was a murmur of an answer.

Then the colonel's voice, again absolutely even: "Yes; well, if I had been told early that I could not get my —— dinner I should have gone out to an hotel"; and then in a very sweet, absolutely charming, deep, soft voice: "I suppose you understand that an episode of this kind is damnably annoying?"

Bliss Henry heard the "Yes, sir," spoken in a voice he might almost have called affectionate.

But he did not attempt to get in touch with the relative.

Something was wrong evidently; so he went out, rather mystified, for something to eat at an hotel, seeing no one as he went down; and when he returned the house was just as he had left it. He entered with his latch-key and found the gas gleaming in the varnish in its wonted way—and silence! He went upstairs and found a cold supper—a glass of milk with a soda syphon near by, a salad, cut bread and butter, and cold chicken. And never another sound that night.

The relative said nothing in the morning. His hot water came as usual; his breakfast; and the relative curtsied just as usual, gave him one look, departed. He asked no questions. He said nothing—asked no explanation, and none was offered. But he noticed that in about two days' time the relative wore a relieved look; and then

he became conscious that she had worn a look of suspense during these two days. He did not make her think she had too early thought need for suspense was over—asked no questions. The affair of the extreme silence was forgotten.

And then came the other thing.

The lonely relative continued to attend to Henry so quietly that he wondered sometimes if she went in stocking soles; and at the end of each week "Mrs." herself came up to see him, fondling his linen, tapped, entered, gave him her friendly, buxom, stoutly coquettish glance and "How do you like Solway?" made some kind of vague conversation, laid down the clothes, and said:

"All aired—I see to that myself. I like to take care of everybody. I've a weak chest—just the chest—not the lungs—you know what I mean—a sensitive chest—I believe in airing clothes. My last husband—bless him!—he used to notice my bosoms—so sensitive, you know—I often wish in cold weather I had a stronger skin; I wish I had a skin as hard as—as hard as—that fender—or"—for this was one of the, as it were, "standing pieces" for every visit, only varied according to what met her eye that seemed vastly more rugged than her epidermis—"as stiff and strong as the crust of that loaf." So at least it was once,

and Henry remembered the phrase; it recurred horribly to mind when he was eating the loaf in question, and he felt then something like a rather sick cannibal.

Ah! Would that he had on his walls his proof of Helleu's dry-point of *Lady Looking at the Watteaus at the Louvre*—the delicacy of its treatment would have helped him then—but it was in a box somewhere between Carter Paterson's dispatching office and the Solway station. He could only remember it. Would that the print of Whistler's *Fur Jacket* were here. Would that he had Wharton's *Sappho*, if only to handle and feel the beauty of the book; or Vernon Lee's *Hortus Vitæ*. This preposterous, baggy landlady made him wish to go and bawl on the housetops that she was not a woman at all, but a kind of erect cow. Why should she be so stolid with it all, so self-complacent?

It relieved him on his next walk on the moor, when, seeing the far blue distance, there came to his head:

"His dreams are far among the silent hills;
His vague voice calls him from the darkened plain
With winds at night; strange recognition thrills
His lonely heart with piercing love and pain;
He knows his sweet mirth in the mountain rills,
His weary tears that touch him with the rain."

It relieved him to remember that a woman had written that. He went back feeling life stately and clean and exquisite, joyous and sane, and beautiful as an old framed miniature.

Henry appeared interested, as a rule, in his landlady's "bosoms"—appearing so for civility's sake, not considering that by being civil, which is good, one may sometimes fail to be something else, which is better; there being civility and civility, and to be courteous to some people is rather to be a hypocrite than a saint. But Bliss Henry did not think of that then.

There he stood bowing and listening when rather would he have said, "Oh, damn your bosoms, madam."

Once she brought him (because of his sympathetic interest) a hideous old engraving, garishly framed, an engraving of a picture of a lady who seemed to Henry to be deformed both as to torso and forehead, a deformed lady, in short, in undress uniform, brought it to this admirer of Helleu's *Lady Looking at the Watteaus!*

"He gave me that because he said it was so beautiful. It reminded him," she said, with a little coquettish giggle, "of my . . . .

She sighed and simpered and went on again: "A delightful man he was—not like——" and her finger pointed down through the floor, plumply

pointed clearly away down below the old colonel and the gasworks person. Henry understood its significance. He had not seen "Mr." her "second"; but he pictured him then as an ogre in shirt-sleeves with a clay pipe in his mouth, something like that terror that looked in at the window in Poe's *Rue Morgue* story, pictured him sitting away down there hideously, below the street level, beside a pint of ale.

Once Henry simply lay back and roared. It had come into his head that she was not a woman at all, but a perambulating Phallic sign!

"What's taken you?" she said.

He roared again.

I think she thought he was slightly crazy, for she laughed a little in sympathy, and then backed out and closed the door. Yet in course of time he got quite to like the lady. He began to see the funny side; his books had not yet arrived, and, when all was said and done, the woman was interesting.

After she had gone one day he lay back and remarked to himself: "Character? Why, she's not a character at all! She's a blessed symbol," and he chortled.

She returned suddenly. At her quick tap he sobered his countenance.

"Come in!" he said.

"*The Daily Mail*," she said. "I forgot that was what I came up with. I get so interested talking."

"Thanks," he said, and began to turn it over, marked the pictures—a photograph of the underside of an electric car with a cross marked on it—"The cross shows the part that hit the little boy." Another: "Lily Lily in her thrill costume that has been censored."

The landlady departed. Then there caught his eye—it had been put in evidently to fill up a space that no "news," or photograph, or advertisement of pills would fit—the four lines:

> "When you are old and gray and full of sleep,
> And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
> And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
> Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep."

Then came that night of sound in the house of silence.

Dinner had just been served, and Henry noticed that the relative seemed distraught. He thought she was nervous—and perhaps had been taking some stimulant to help her.

Suddenly far in the bowels of the earth was a cry; then another cry—up a little; then higher still. The crying out came higher and higher, till it reached the hall.

And this was the house in which the author

of *The Jewelled Snuff-box* and *The Japanese Fan* was to write his new, charming romance, a romance of which the reviewers would say, heading their special reviews very probably with such phrases as "*Dolce far Niente*" or "A Bowl of Roses": "An exquisite romance told with his wonted charm, a charm that defies analysis. There are Italian wines with the sunlight in them, not great of body, but no ordinary wines. There are also the idyllic romances of Bliss Henry, charming, dainty, elegiac. They are of modern life of men and women of to-day, but their women have the charm one feels in thinking of the lost ladies of old years, of their lavender and roses. He makes the present as charming as the past, as charming and unreal and delightful."

The outcrying below mounted higher, and now the words were audible. It was the voice of the lady that Bliss Henry, sitting there waiting for his books, heard first:

"You would hit me, I suppose, would you?"

Then a gruff voice said:

"I don't suggest hitting you."

"You had better not!"

Henry heard that cry of the buxom lady, and for a moment thought of flying to succour her—the female in distress; but the man's voice was very calm, and it is perhaps wrong—effeminate—

to be guided at all by such "somehows"—but *somehow* the man's voice seemed as if he were in the right!

"You're only trying to tantalise me," Henry heard him exclaim. "I never raised a hand to you in my life. I'm only——" the man began.

"You raised a hand! Oh, you wretch!" cried the woman.

"Gently, gently. I'm only speaking for your good."

"Ah! The one before you, *he* was kindness and goodness——" cried the woman; the rest was lost; and then Henry heard a strangling cry of "bosoms."

"For my good! Why, you——"

"You're hysterical—that's the kindest word I can use," said the man.

"*You* use a kind word! *You* use a kind word!"

After that the tumult descended step by step. Then:

"Ah! You're running away down when I come up where men can hear how you treat me and come to my aid."

There was no answer audible from the man; but the lady's voice came again, from farther off:

"Yes, I'm coming down—of course I'm coming

down. Do you think I'm afraid of your threats—with *men* in the house ? "

Then lower still :

" *Men*, I say, in the house. *My* house ! Not your house ! I pay the rent ! I pay everything ! You——" the voice went lower, " are a——" (Henry lost it), " yes, that's what you are ! Ah——" There was a yell.

Henry could stand no more. This place was of no use to him. He was not writing serials for the —— ——. It caught him on the raw—not in his literary part. It was of no use to him, and he knew so little of this world into which he had been plunged, that, though for the sake of humanity he felt he should do something, he did not know what to do. He was as well-meaning and exquisite and useless as one of his own beloved heroes. He had thought that the lady was to blame ; but at that cry he feared that her " second " must have lost his calm control and stabbed her. She emitted such a terrible yell. He leapt to his feet, ran to the door and half-way down his own flight ; and then he bethought him that when people are killed they can't yell like that.

He went slowly back again, and then silence fell.

Next day, when he came home from a visit

to the station to enquire if his boxes had yet arrived, putting his key in the lock, and swinging open the door, as it were, all in one glad gesture—for the boxes had arrived and would be delivered next day—he beheld my lady and a gentleman standing embracing each other in the hall!

The atmosphere in that hall-way was not helpful for Bliss Henry. It was an atmosphere that an alert, self-preservative instinct made him desire to dodge, even before he had time to argue about the instinct in his mind, in his fashion of a transcendentalist, and discover the source of his aversion: a quick hunger gnawed him for a high and holy place, a high, free place of contemplative air, above the elbowings and jostlings of passions and materialism.

The gust of wind from the door told the lascivious embracers of the presence of the author, and they untwined. The man looked half sheepish, half oxish. The lady looked—well, just fat and nothing else. Then she emitted a thick, foolish laugh, and ogled Bliss Henry and said, "Good evening."

"Good evening," he said politely.

Under cover of his wife's good evening the man scuttled into a shadow in the rear of the hall. She called him, and he reappeared.

"My husband," she said. "I don't think you've met him before. Very handy man he is."

"How do you do?" said Henry, gave him a quick look, bowed into space, and moved on upstairs, fixing his eyes on the steps.

But hardly had he settled in his room, in the chair by the open window, when the handy man entered on a peremptory, military tap, to enquire "if there was anything I could do for you, sir, any boots to repair, any little odd job—just come to me, sir—I'm a handy man—only too pleased," and as Henry thanked him civilly the handy man explained that he had been a soldier, and in quick, jerky stages, before Henry was well aware, had begun a story of the Indian Mutiny which only a discourteous man could possibly have stemmed after the first three sentences.

As Henry said, when the story seemed really finished, to judge by the soldier's staring, expectant eyes, "That's very interesting," he told it again.

It was a story, Henry gathered on the second telling, of how the handy man's brains had been complimented by the colonel.

"He evidently—er—saw you were a clever man," Henry suggested, thinking if he said something the old soldier would say "Thank you" and go.

So the handy man wiped the sweat from his brow with a large red handkerchief and told his tale again.

It took a long time; and then, at last, the lady came up, tapped, and entered on the middle of the story—at least it sounded like the middle.

"You're getting enough of my old man now, I should think," said "Mrs." "Come away, my pet."

The old worthy servant of his country and maintainer of empire waved his red handkerchief.

"I've just been telling him about the colonel of ours and the dispatch box," explained the pet.

"Oh!"

Thereupon the pet began to tell the tale again to both, Henry sitting broken, staring; "Mrs." standing looking at her handy man fondly. Then she got a little tired and sat down. It was late afternoon. Henry cleared his throat and mopped his brow.

"By the way," he said, "I shall be leaving you."

The husband rose abruptly, dropped his wet handkerchief, picked it up, and stared at his wife.

"Mrs." rose heavily, as heavily as she had sat down.

"Anything wrong?" they both asked simultaneously, looking to each other and then at Henry.

"Oh, no," said Henry. "I'm going back to the hotel. I'm—well, I'm going back to-night—I—eh—well—you see, one gets some company there——"

"I told you," said "Mrs.," turning to the colonel's indispensable worthy, "that the gentleman was bound to be lonely, and you should come up and see if you couldn't entertain him of an evening with your tales about the Mutiny."

Her husband slunk from the room and shuffled downstairs.

"I mean—eh——" stammered Henry, "when I said—eh—one gets company there—I meant one can get quiet there."

"Mrs." stared at him and backed oddly to the door.

"I shall pay you a week in lieu of notice, and go at once, if you will be so good as to send up a note of my bill."

She backed out, staring at the lunatic; and half an hour later he departed, leaving his valise and suit-case in the hall to be called for by the hotel porter.

The silent relative held the door open. "Mrs."

stood back a little beyond the stairs. The short-winded, retired sergeant's head showed at top of the shadowy steps that led down to the catacombs.

Henry went down the five steps into the street with a feeling of having escaped from a madhouse, and, turning, gave one furtive look at the silent relative in bombazine, standing expressionless at the door, holding it wide open till he should have gained the street. It was there that he turned and gave the farewell nod. The lay figure curtsied. He marched away.

The door softly shut.

V

IT was good to be *installed*, as he was three days later.

He had gone from that, to him, distressful house, to the hotel, purchasing on the way a bottle of Condy's Fluid and a cake of carbolic soap, ordered a hot bath, sent the "boots" to the station to inform the station-master that a new address would be supplied in a day or two for the delivery of the crates of books, they to be stored meantime. After his bath he sent the returned "boots" out into Solway to beat up the booksellers, with a slip of paper on which he had written "Matthew Arnold's Poems." An hour later the "boots" returned a little quiet.

"I've been to every bookshop in Solway," he said, standing twisting his cap and beaming his naive smile, "and I can't get it." He shook his head and grinned and looked apologetic. It was droll enough to him that a gentleman should want anything to read except a halfpenny paper, but he felt a certain respect for a gentleman who wanted an unprocurable book. "There isn't one in Solway. Beg pardon, sir—you're sure it's Matthew was the Christian name?"

"Eh? Certainly—not Edwin."

"Ah! That's all right, sir." He had a new respect for this gentleman—evidently the gentleman knew his subject. He wondered if the gentleman was as acute on the subject of racing; if the "gent" knew about horses like this, perhaps later, when they knew each other better, one might get the tip to spot a winner. "One shop they had a book by someone name of Edwin—as you say, sir—and I thought it might do as well."

"No; it would not have done as well," said Bliss Henry. "Thanks all the same."

"Then you wouldn't have it, even being unable to get this here Matthew's? Gent in the shop says they're relatives, sir."

"The relationship is, I fear, purely accidental, then," Henry said solemnly, but the corners of mouth and eyes smiled.

"It wouldn't serve like at a pinch? Very happy, sir, to go again," said the boots, and looked with pleasure on the "gent's" puckering smile.

"Thank you, boots, you're a good boy—but to have sought for Matthew and not found him is better than having found Edwin. Good night."

"Good night, sir, and thank you."

Three days later he had new "rooms," his books sent thither, and the unpacking operation was over. The last wisp of packing-straw out of

the seven cases of books and framed things had been removed. The sitting-room of his new abode was swept and garnished; and the elderly person who was to be honoured by his occupancy had departed.

He stood in his room turning slowly about, like a chimney-top in a day of faint wind, surveying his walls: looking on the books on the mantelpiece; books in the little toy-like hanging bookcase; books in the little toy-like revolving one (not his, but his landlady's, won in a raffle); and books along the back of the sideboard.

He had his prints up now: Helleu's *Cigarette, No. 1*, and *Lady Looking at the Watteaus at the Louvre*, which he was going to discard, or, rather, just move away from, for a reason which will be stated; a Whistler that was going to come nearer to him—of a shop with a hanging tapestry in the window, a child on the three steps leading up to its door, a poetic mystery in its glimpsed recesses, sunlight—and the butterfly on its wall; a scaffolded building by Muirhead Bone; two photographs. I am sorry to thrust in on this selection from his decorations with the financial details—but his removal thither, the processes between leaving London and settling here in the quiet place where he was to work better by pretending to himself that he was on holiday, had

left him with £70 out of the £100. Still—even that can serve a dreamer.

"At any rate," thought he, "I am now anchored again. I am here—incontestably here. I did not feel here at all in that queer house—felt here at the hotel a little bit—but now—now I *am* here."

He walked to the window for another look at the view which he hoped would get on well with him; yes, he found it friendly, it being an open view of fields with a twist of far-off river showing steel among the purple and green, and blue hills beyond. So far satisfied, he went forth to select a stationer's shop for the purchase of the utensils of his trade. Three blank weeks he had been in Solway; even that had not been done, he desiring only, so far, to gain a sense of having his castle round him. Lacking that sense, it were in vain to lay in pen and paper. He could only tramp each day on the moors above the town and ask each day on every separate return: "My boxes come yet?" not but what I believe that even the delay of the books was not an unmixed evil. To tramp the moor roads was really an eternal matter. And later, when he found Solway not at all interested in Eternity, he would know where to go for the peace that Solway could not give. For of course you knew, knowing that

peace is an affair not of a place but of the heart, knew from the very beginning that this idea of going to Solway for peace was all fudge.

Every day found him tramping on the high moor that stretches, more or less, from a little south of Glasgow to a little north of Leeds—a happy thought that gives a sense of space to him who considers it, tramping in the heather. At first, at the beginning of each walk, in the blazing sun, he went often with puckered eyes downcast to the road; so he saw its beauty, the road itself a whity-grey, and the Macadamised rock here and there, where it had been lately repaired, glinting blue. Then would come a part where one could walk on the grass by the roadside, the bushes being thinned away, and he would go stepping there as on velvet. On either hand the moors spread with their rolls and hollows, and now and then a moor bird rose fluttering a little way, lazily, through the effulgent summer.

A sip at a wayside spring, that had to be come at over a slightly squelchy, boggy space of moss and drenched grass, was a sip to be remembered through life. A rest by the stream's side, near a beloved linn, while legs tingled with a pleasurable and healthful exhaustion—oh, these rests! They were different from the rests in his top-back in Chelsea after journeys home through the fiery streets of

midsummer London. There even the rests were like pain. Here even the tirednesses were like pleasure.

Now he must get down to work. Now he must go forth and buy pen, ink, and paper. And he went out into a new Solway now, that afternoon.

What I want to know is: Was it his factitious Solway, or the actual Solway, that he went into now; was he finding the real Solway or the real self?

VI

MRS. STURGE, the landlady, was clearing away the breakfast dishes and chattering. The clamour of the church bells broke out, ricochetting through the little town, and, as she came and went, that lady with the eyes of slumbering furies and superstitions, looked through the window, paused with full hands. Bliss Henry, glancing up at her, saw her scrutinising the churchgoers.

"There's our ex-mayor," she said. "Our ex-mayor," she repeated.

He rose for courtesy (I fancy that before we get through with him we shall find that Bliss Henry had to devise some way of protecting his courtesy; as Emerson says, even love has to protect itself!), and as he rose he suggested to himself that an author should know all things, and thus disabuse idiots of the idea that an author is a mere "literary man," whatever that may mean. He should even know about ex-mayors.

So he rose and saw the ex-mayor, had him pointed out, perceived him, took note of him.

"Fond of dogs, I should think," he murmured,

" and of old port ; a trifle arrogant ; sometimes gets drunk."

" Oh ! You've heard about him ? " suggested Mrs. Sturge, and looked round, admiring her new lodger's swiftness in culling local gossip, and expectant of its rehearsal.

" Not I," said Henry, shaking his head, and his gaze suddenly leaving the mayor to follow with quick joy the recurring—recurring—again quick recurring flight of a martin round the eaves. " I'm only guessing."

Mrs. Sturge admired what she conceived to be the discretion of her lodger, and said : " That's right, Mr. Henry ; I think we should speak ill of no one—though I could tell you some queer stories of this town, if it's stories you want. I take you, begging your pardon, I'm an honest woman, and don't hold by hypocrisy . . ." but Henry was thinking about the martin scudding round the eaves, and he was singing, with the unheard melody, to himself, Gautier's—

" Des ailes ! des ailes ! des ailes !
Comme dans le chant de Ruckert,
Pour voler la-bas avec elles
Au soleil d'or, au printemps vert ! "

His landlady's voice was going on : " . . . and seeing your pens and papers lying about, I took

you for a writer of some kind, and when I mentioned your name—not talking about you, but just by accident, as it were—to somebody—I forget who—they said they believed you were a friction author. They had seen the name somewhere, and I thought of the pens and paper—not that I said any more about my suspicions. I wouldn't discuss my gentlemen." She drew up with her grand air. "Ah! That's Mrs. Montague, and her daughter, Miss Montague." Bliss Henry looked and saw them. He said nothing. But he wondered if what he thought then was exact as what he thought of the ex-mayor seemed to have been.

"They are the wealthiest people in the town," said Mrs. Sturge. "There's a young lady now to suit you—a fine lady-like young lady," and she gave him a succulent old sticky smile with a kind of edge on it.

"Might I have a little more coal, Mrs. Sturge?" Henry suggested.

"Yes, Mr. Henry; I'll tell May," and Mrs. Sturge departed with a certain precipitancy, and Henry was aware that though there was precipitancy she had a spine, though that had no more effect on him than to cause a plaintive smile to drift over his face. The last impression she left was, distinctly, that she had stiffened. Henry stretched

and sighed—and relaxed, filled his pipe slowly and blew a column of smoke. He looked at the blue whorls drifting leisurely and gracefully upward and enjoyed them. And, of course, again he had his bit of appropriate literature—from a pipe rondeau by Henley :

> ". . ., our perfumed reverie,
> A mild-eyed and mysterious ecstasy,
> In purple whorls and delicate spires ascending
> Like hope materialised, inquiringly
> Towards the unknown Infinite is wending."

If Bliss Henry had had to hunt for other men's expressions of his passing thoughts and finer emotions he would have been more aged and smelling of the scholar's lamp than he was. But his "apt quotations" always came with a leap of spontaneity like a boy's laugh. The world without might sometimes jar him, but take his own life all round and I think he had achieved, or made for himself, a world not so pitiable—a happy world of glad, airy actualities.

VII

HENRY wandered round the shelves in the shop of the bookseller and stationer in Solway. I say "the," though there were others, because this one had on sale no small crockery with the town's crest on it.

The books were such as one might expect in Solway, even though there was no small coat-of-arms crockery. In glass cases were morocco-bound and padded Hoods, Tennysons, Elizabeth Barrett Brownings. In long rows were boys' books and girls' books, with much gilt and many coloured plates. There were guide books on tables, picture postcards in revolving show-cases. But in a corner Henry paused, a row of books on a shelf there detaining him, for the books were of the kind known as *belles-lettres*. At sight of them such a joy came into his heart that, if he had been introspective at the moment, he might have suspected, feeling then joyful, that he had perhaps been sad before—or perhaps that he had just been beginning to be lonely in Solway and had not admitted it to himself. He was glad to see these books as might a Martian, wandering exiled on this earth,

be glad to find here a chunk of stone not a bit like the surrounding stone, but one he recognised, without any disrespect toward the stones on this planet, as from his.

"Pardon me," said the bookseller, "these books are ordered books—they are not for sale."

"Oh," said Henry, and bowed to them as he might have bowed an apology for having by accident looked, in passing, into a stranger's study, of which the blinds were not drawn. "Well," he turned and looked in the bookseller's eyes and knew he could say it quite straightforwardly, "they are the only books I can see that I wish to handle."

"I am afraid you will find Solway rather lonely for you then," said the bookseller, and scrutinised him with puckering eyes as an artist views a model. "I know only one—or two—customers for such books."

Henry continued his perambulations along the rows. He was too desirous to be courteous, after the late rudeness of staring at someone else's shrine, to ask who the customers might be—even though he would have liked to know, being already, though he did not know it, solitary in Solway.

The bookseller's eyes were on him still, following him, scrutinizing, intent.

"But even in that row you don't care for them all?" he suggested.

Henry turned and looked, not at the books, but looked his man again in the eyes.

"I find myself," he said slowly, "almost appearing arrogant in what I am about to say—I was about to say: 'One cannot have all well. This, at least, is *getting there*. There are discrepancies; there are flaws; but whoever ordered these has an eye in the right direction.' You observe how blandly I say, 'the right direction,' as though——"

"Why not? I presume you have thought, pondered, meditated in your life. Why be more humble than those who do not—those who do not ever think and yet have very hard and fast codes, oh, very hard and fast, and you must conform to them or they make you an outcast?"

The two men looked at each other a long while. At first Henry had wondered, "Is he a bit of a sycophant, without the outward bearing of one, never, for instance, rubbing his hands and bowing over them, a clever sycophant?" But he decided: "No, he's not. He's a Man."

"I say," said Henry, "I'm awfully glad to meet you."

"Are you to be in Solway long?" asked the bookseller.

"Oh, perhaps six months, perhaps longer."

"Then I shall see you in here sometimes," said the bookseller.

Yes; he was a man.

VIII

"DID you notice," said the bookseller, laying down his pen and turning from a business-looking ruled volume on his desk, in which he had been writing—not sitting, but bent over the desk with the air of saying, "Just a minute till I enter this"—"did you notice that our remarks on books the other day led us off at once to life? They seemed to be remarks on life as well—quite mixed up in it." He saw ink on his second finger and balanced himself on one leg to wipe it on a sock.

"Yes; and you reminded me of an instance, brought it all up before me again."

"Oh!" The bookseller's foot came down and he stood to attention—and then at ease.

"Yes; a woman I once met and knew for a little while. We were thrown together by accident. She had travelled and had three languages. But I began to find that every conversation that we had drifted always somehow to—well, to a sort of feeling that I had been led whither I had no desire to go. Her eyes generally told me—and the atmosphere; also a kind of alert, victorious air she wore then. Her eyes used to dance, brighten, she seemed to become the

tabernacle of a fierce hilarity. She spoke of Maeterlinck once, I remember, and from the vague tapered it down to *Monna Vanna* and the essay on Silence—and then came to the passage, or sentence of the essay on Silence—spoke about the wonderful bit about being alone in a room with one, in silence, and feeling in that silence. Then she spoke of Anatole France—and soon tapered him into *Thaïs*—and then, again, a bit only, of *Thaïs*."

"I don't know France," said the bookseller; "but I see what you mean about Maeterlinck."

"She was the same all round. It gave me a shock to see her books and find how one could have three languages, and a college career, and travel, and make one expect something, and then give—and evidently acquire, at the end of all—*that*."

"And I suppose you've met quite illiterate women who, without books, could acquire all she had lost?"

"Not acquire—had it already. The horrific thing is to see where it is possible for the mere beast to find herbage. It's terribly misleading. If a man tells me he reads Maeterlinck and Anatole France, I know he is of those who have a bit in them that aspires. That woman—oh, the feel of her!—I always think of her as something slimy that had climbed over a bust of Anatole France on my mantel-

shelf and left a streak of slime that smelt of hair and perspiration on it."

"Never mind. It won't spoil the bust."

"But, my God, man, it talks about the bust it has been over and may delude——"

"It didn't delude you?" asked the bookseller, but almost with the tone of one stating a fact a little belligerently.

"No! True! It gave me a feel of horror and a feel of——"

"Of——?" said Haskell, and brought his lips together like a priest's or an actor's.

Henry sighed.

"Well, a feeling that one must be careful and *not* be deluded—must not be gulled by a name. Ah! I have it!"

"Yes?"

"These things make us stronger. After all, it's a tribute to us when the Devil gives up shoving the raw material under our noses, but dresses it up."

The bookseller's eyes were radiant. It was as if he had watched a man perfectly solving a puzzle the while the man kept on saying, "I can't do this."

"I see where you are travelling," he said thoughtfully. Then he sighed. "I wonder," he said, staring unseeing at the wall where Ade, Lester Arnold, Boothby, Corelli sat blindly in worn covers, "if, till the end of all things, there will be a fight

for those who do travel, and pitfalls all the way—more cleverly covered as the way goes on."

"Doubtless—but they are only covered more cleverly because the traveller is more clever, greater. But always he is great enough to see the pitfall and pass on."

"We seem to be talking of men and women?" suggested the bookseller.

"Of all things," said Henry.

There was a space of silence; the bookseller put his left hand to his clean jaw and stroked it with the palm, looking sidewise; his unseeing gaze, unseeing so far as circulating library went, was riveted meaninglessly on the row where stood, shabbily and worn, William Westall, Stanley Weyman, John Strange Winter—the juxtaposition of company in a circulating library being droll as that at a Lord Mayor's banquet.

"Then," said the bookseller, "as a side issue, let me suggest—is woman but the slimy thing on your bust always? Does the symbol serve for those who can see through a thing? Even when she gets three languages, and travels, is she just that, the slimy thing on the bust, and even her Maeterlinck and France talk just to aid her in her crawl, seeing the man has them?"

"I believe," said Henry, and his head went up oddly and he looked away before him, "that there

are women who will accompany man because he is travelling, to travel also, with him, because he is strong——"

"Pardon me," said the bookseller, "there is someone in the shop," and he departed and left Henry alone in the back premises amongst the hotch-potch of books bought but not sorted. Henry turned his eyes from them and gazed through the window on the little court visible to rear, with a bit of old Solway opposite, a mullioned window, with the gold of some reflected sunlight in it, a white-washed wall with a creamy, elusive light in it—a kind of "light that never was," he thought, and yet, to be seen, of course *is;* though that seemed the only way to express it, the tangible, for some reason, being always called the real, even by poets; seldom even a poet having the courage to say "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

When Haskell came back, gaily, he almost startled Bliss Henry, the world our author had been in during Haskell's absence having been so real.

"It was the young lady to take the books you were looking at," he said; but Henry was, despite the almost start, still staring at the shaft of sunlight that came through the window, at the motes dancing on it. There was a great quiet there—just a shaft of sunlight. Henry turned back a little on

Haskell's return, standing foursquare as it were, staring; the bookseller standing suddenly still, the expectancy with which he had returned fading from his face. The talk seemed not interrupted, but over.

"Well," said Henry, "I'm afraid time flies. I'll look in again—good day." He walked out of the "circulating library" into the shop and paused, the bookseller following a little way, his eyes wide. Then Henry turned in the centre of the shop, the sunlit street without, the tapping of feet going to and fro on it, looked back again, nodded.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning," said the bookseller.

IX

LITTLE Colonel Jukes, to whom Henry had a letter of introduction, was a man that tickled Henry. He had charge of the town records, some city post that entailed dictating letters, in the phrasing of which he took great pride, but not so much joy as he took in his scrap album—a curious medley of cuttings and portraits, chiefly relating to persons who had some connection with Solway or the district.

He was a short, broad man, with an air almost dapper; dapper without being dapper—which Henry found entertaining; he was dapper by personality, not by costume. He had a way of standing talking with hands on ribs, fingers backward, then removing his pince-nez and throwing them at his interlocutor; but, as the pince-nez were affixed to a button of his waistcoat by a slender chain, they were fairly safe despite this usage, fell with a gentle clatter, swung plumb-like by the chain, steadied gently, trembling, and then somehow, by the way they hung, drew attention to the fact that Colonel Jukes had a slight tendency to paunch and also stood with his legs well taught-

ened—a fine, fresh, vigorous, clean little figure of a well-built man—*with* a kindly eye, sparkling eye.

He had a witty way of describing the magnates of the town, so that Henry might know them. Jukes had every opportunity to know them, he being secretary to the town, it would appear—librarian, curator of the museum, secretary to the local art school, and I know not what besides—quite secretary to the town, letter-writer for every illiterate councillor, tongue in cheek often, putting into unfittingly perfect business English their preposterous and amusing ideas.

A councillor had once called him a jack-in-office! The way of that was that the councillor had wanted to harangue his fellow-citizens for their vote in the news-room of the public library. The librarian informed him, politely enough, that he could not speak there; but he persisted, with a snort at Jukes, raising his voice in oratorical falsetto with: "Hic! Fellow-electorates, I have pleasure in standing before you——"

"Pardon me," said Jukes, "I must inform you that this is against the rules, and must ask you to retire."

"I shall report you for insolence to the committee," said the councillor.

"At the moment I must perform the duties that

the committee has appointed me to perform," said Jukes, " and request that you retire."

" I refuse," said the councillor, drawing up with a shuddering movement in his shoulders.

The bumpkins reading the daily papers scratched their heads and opened their mouths.

" You are a jack-in-office and I am a councillor. You can't put me out," said the councillor. " Jack-in-office," he ended.

The jack-in-office walked to the door and opened it.

" Councillor Williams, will you go ! "

Councillor Williams, for some reason, went ; and then the jack-in-office retired to his sanctum and wrote a minute on the matter to his town's committee : " Gentlemen, I have to inform you that this evening, at eight o'clock, in pursuance of my duties as curator of the town's library," etc. etc. ; and after the next council meeting a written apology came to him from the councillor.

He was just reading it, smiling, when the mayor entered and shook hands with him.

" Nothing special," said the mayor, and drew a hand down his Vandyke beard ; " I was just passing and looked in. We had a council meeting last night," his chubby, red face wrinkled in a smile, the beard thrust out, and he shook hands again in his affable manner, his eyes telling of some great

interior hilarity, and away he went without telling the joke, just looking back a moment grinning on Jukes—Jukes grinning on him.

Bliss Henry had seen in Jukes's eye the possibilities of such a story long ere he heard this particular story ; and also he saw the signs of the scrap album in the colonel's fussy little movements.

Henry came to drop in often at the sanctum of this secretary to everything in the town and hear him talk.

" We have no great demands for any books such as you, I suspect, would call books," said the colonel one day. " I must tell you a thing that will interest you : some time ago two persons asked for the complete works of Dickens and pored over them for three days. Then they got out Thackeray and spent three days over him. This sort of thing continued for some time, and then one day the gentleman explained in a friendly way to me that he had been taking part in a great anagram competition, I believe he called it, and had won one hundred pounds. Still, one or two persons in town do have what you would call an interest in life, have a thirst for knowledge—is that it ?—geology, botany. Ah ! there is one such now," Colonel Jukes peered away along through the vista of glass partitions behind which lay (according to the statements on their varnished doors) newspaper-room, reference-room,

writing-room, lending-department, and so forth. "Ah—she has just gone out—an interesting girl—Miss Montague."

"Oh! What kind of woman is she?"

"Oh!—reads. There are one or two literary women in town. There's a Miss Fox, I believe she does literary work of some kind. She often comes in to look up the old town files—takes an interest in her country. I think you would get on with her."

"I've a sort of introduction to her."

Jukes gave a little bow.

"She comes in here too. I know her slightly from that; but that's all. Miss Montague, however, you'd like. I'd like to introduce you. She's charming and she's up-to-date. You'd like her, I fancy."

"The sort of woman a man can get along with? Can really talk—has real interest in life—in books—eh? The sort of woman one can be at home with?"

"Yes."

"I like women like that—to squat on the floor with and look over a file of etchings, and rave and smoke with over books."

"Smoke with! Oh, scissors!" cried the colonel, and put a paper-weight on some missives, flicked some dust from them.

"Oh, well, I speak figuratively," said Henry with a little nod, and stared at the paper-weight.

The colonel put on his pendent glasses again and then threw them away, and stood smiling to himself; then he became suddenly fussy, arranging more papers, flicking dust, but smiling all through the performance of these trivialities.

Henry left him soon, and on the way home thought:

"That sweet, elderly boy is dying to tell someone what I said."

Steps sounded to rear, hurrying—and the colonel made up on him, dapper and buttoned and erect, his chest a little more military than when indoors.

"I'm just going to lunch," he said. "I had no idea the time had passed so. Looked at my watch after you left and just shut my desk and followed."

They walked together, the colonel talking lightly on various themes with the air of a man thinking of another, like a schoolboy repeating the solution of a problem under his breath to memorise it.

"Well, good morning; I turn off here," he said presently, standing still with neck well pressed back against his collar, smiling, hand extended. "By the way," he turned back, bubbling, scintillating, "Solway is not London. You do not squat on the floor and smoke here with the other sex. Certainly never alone——"

"Why?"

"Well—they don't do it here," and the colonel lowered his head sidewise and looked up as if at the edge of his eyebrows, lips pursed the while.

"Oh!" said Henry lightly.

The colonel's odd gaze and puckers ebbed.

"No, you don't do that here without hearing of it," and the colonel's eyes went wide.

"Oh, I don't mind hearing," said Henry with his light toss of head, the colonel infecting him and making him as gesticulative as an Italian actor—or ice-cream vendor, let us say.

The colonel took a new measure of Henry.

"You don't know our *convenances*," said he, without any elaborate histrionic display.

"I know only decency and freedom from ill-intent," said Henry quietly—and then, with vigour, but still quietly, "and, damn it all, sir, if a man and woman have tastes in common, why shouldn't they meet, unless, unless——"

"Unless?"

"Unless for fear of giving a chance for the depraved to say, 'Oh, they do so; why not we? They can't consider themselves right and us wrong.'"

Colonel Jukes seemed thoughtful. He might have been present at a court martial by his air.

"That would be your only restraining thought

in not inviting a woman to see you and rave on your floor ? " he asked, pressing his chin into his collar.

" I think so—my only one," Henry replied slowly.

The colonel looked him long in the eye and then said :

" Yes ; I believe you are all right. It is refreshing to meet you ; if you intend living like that we shall have some gossip in Solway. That sort of thing is not *comme il faut.*"

" No," said Henry ; " and I hear that those who make the *convenances* in Solway never read anything, never think anything—perhaps that is why they are what they are ? But, good God, do you tell me that whenever a man and woman are left alone in Solway they think of what Shakespeare called incestuous pleasure ! "

It was an ejaculation ; it was not spoken as a question ; and so the witty colonel enjoyed, bubblingly, his rejoinder :

" Yes—in Solway anyhow."

" Oh, well," sighed Henry, " that explains Solway then."

They parted at that with a quick look each to each.

" Now," thought Henry, " he's going to go and talk ; I know. And all he *can* talk is about the smoking, which I meant least. You see, it would be

indelicate to say the rest to a lady—very terrible, very indelicate."

He squared his shoulders. He felt as if he was going to have a fight with Solway, if he touched it. He thought perhaps he had better not touch.

Anti-climax : And then he gave a grim smile as he remembered the colonel's twinkling eyes. Colonel Jukes had a sense of humour to such an extent that it saved him from ever seeing the tragic in life ; when a thing was not humorous to him it was merely painful ; whereas Bliss Henry saw humour and tragedy ; also he saw squalor and buffoonery. He was not the sort of man that Colonel Jukes would say had a very great sense of humour.

X

HENRY was "far too direct," oh, "far too direct," quite shockingly direct, when he came close to certain things, in the phrases he used to express how these things appeared in his eyes; not that he was prone to heated invective, far from it—it was his precise, uncontrovertable exactness of statement and expression that made him "oh, far too direct." He was a very disturbing element when he came in touch with the prurient, for there was that about him that made them, in replying with the usual "How shocking you are! How vulgar! How nasty!" know that he was nothing of the sort and that *they* were not honest.

But Colonel Jukes liked him immensely—liked his directness, his desperate, flashing seriousness; and the colonel was tickled at the thought of this dear, ingenuous man in Solway, just as he would have been tickled at the sight of, say, the parson reading prayers in a state of nature. The colonel was a clear-skinned bachelor, who had long since given up wine because it "played the deuce with my side somehow." He felt almost as if he would like to egg this stranger on, to egg him on to live up to his ideas in Solway.

But despite the hopes of the colonel's practical-joker side, Bliss Henry did nothing unwonted for the moment. Henry left them alone—was in Solway, but not of it. He relished its grey days and its sunny, and the blue hill air over it; and after Colonel Jukes's explanation of Solway he lifted his eyes to the hills afresh, went for rambles on the moors, dismissed Solway, let the dirty taste that he had got in his mouth go from it in deep breaths as he walked, notebook in pocket, the surrounding country among heather and grouse. Solways rarely try to attack Bliss Henrys; they just wait for the Henrys to commit themselves, for they always get hurt in attacking. If the Henrys take a long time to commit themselves the Solways may give them "invitations," in the hope of getting them into the hive and, once in, of burying them in with wax, right in the hive.

But at present Henry strolled down to his bookseller, calm and self-possessed and free. It was Saturday afternoon and his journals should be awaiting him.

The bookseller hailed him with joy, the morning shoppers being gone, the evening ones not yet claiming everybody's attention.

"Come in, come in," said the bookseller; "don't stand in the shop. I want a chat. Oh, your journals—Mr. Henry's papers—thanks—there

you are; now——" he led the way through the library into the back premises, the "circulating library," where a medley of books was stacked awaiting classification.

They stood together looking at the litter, and then the bookseller, straightening a stack of old books, remarked:

"I've been thinking about our talk when last you were in here." He rose from his task and looked up in rising. "Don't you think you aim too high? Your ideas, I mean—not practical, not practicable?"

Henry fixed him with his eye and read this not as a doubt, nearly so much as a feeling, of him.

"Quite practicable—when alone," he said. "Of course 'other existences there are which clash with ours.' Pray don't think me—— Oh, no, I see" (he looked in the face of the bookseller), "I see you don't think me selfish when I say that. I speak as an aspirer, not as misanthrope. At first when you said 'Don't you think you aim too high?' I thought I had been mistaken in you, that you were of those who are quite unwilling to listen to one who does aspire unless to, when he is done, say: 'Don't you think you aim too high?'" He gave his droll smile. "But no, you are not of those. You are merely remembering those who say so and, thanking them for the reminder, as it were, saying

the phrase to yourself, asking yourself if they, or you, are right. My friend—you are right."

The bookseller grew grave and his eyes were very wide and full.

"I wish I had met you long ago," he said.

"There you are," said Henry; "one always does—we are so scarce and that makes us, by God, very lonely sometimes."

The bookseller's eyebrows lifted. It somehow eased him to hear that tone.

"Yes," said Henry slowly; "one always wishes, when one attains something, that one had seen the simple way to attain it before—but perhaps one was not ready then—oh, I don't know—it's queer—yes; it's always lonely, with just an occasional and magnificent oasis for anyone who wants to feel—feel—eh—oh, mounting on, and not sliding back. But if one never met another with such thoughts one *might* let them go—as quite futile. It's queer—oh, I don't know."

"Well—there is my point; is it possible to go on as you seemed to indicate, more than to say, in our last talk, to go on so—always?"

"For a certainty one must begin by making one's heights and not one's depths the standard. That's where women irritate me. See," he took his stick loosely by thumb and finger and began swinging it like a pendulum. "See—the aspirer comes up here

and swings down and comes up here. He is, however, the soul of honour, and the woman knows that!" (He kept on swinging his stick and the bookseller watched it, fascinated.) "She catches him as he swings past here—here—the bottom of the swing." (He swung his stick with higher ends to the swinging.) "Some women, God bless them, do come up with the man—a bit—perhaps up to there" (he indicated a small segment of the swing), "bless them for that."

"Some of them," said the bookseller, following keenly, "pretend to—till they are married."

Henry glared on him.

"Yes," he said; "that's another point. I had not thought of that just now."

"Never mind. Go on. I'm only seeing side-issues—additions. Go on with your 'symbol,'" Haskell requested.

Bliss Henry swung his stick again.

"The majority just sit down there," he said, indicating the low end of the pendulum's swing with the forefinger of his disengaged left hand; "heavy, weighty as dead meat; and if the man refuses to acknowledge that he has touched them in passing, there is a row."

"You would not have him refuse to be responsible?"

"God forbid! The man who could refuse is a

cad, despicable—despicable as the woman who, knowing his sense of honour, relies on it and never swings up for his sad sake."

He paused a moment, gazing like a visionary, and swung his stick again till he swung it level at each height. Then said he :

"When the man and woman swing thus together, and stop not at all at the bottom of the swing, but swing thus—thus !—thus ! " He was swinging his stick so that it described the whole semicircle—the whole possible swing of a pendulum.

"What then ? " asked the bookseller.

Henry raised the stick erect as in a salute, and then described the top half of the circle.

"It will not be for a long, long time ; but we who know must go on unfaltering. There are dangers ; and one must remember them ; there are too many evil, mean, despicable people to take advantage of every good to hang evil on it."

"The crawly thing on your bust of Pallas, or whatever it was ? " suggested the bookseller.

Henry gave a glad nod.

"Yes—just like that."

"But what then—what then ? " said the bookseller ; "and you will observe that we are back to sex again."

"Um ! Yes—damn it, 'tis so. Well ! Perhaps

when we get that settled we shall be able to go on ; perhaps that must first be settled."

He took his stick and swung it slowly, pendulum-wise, and both watched it swinging till it swung out straight at either top.

Suddenly he gave it a spin that made it form the whole circle. Then he held it erect as if to make once more the upper half alone, and as he did so a step entered the shop, paused. The book-seller did not go out, leaving it to his assistant to attend ; but the step came on and a woman's rich voice said : " Mr. Haskell in ? Thanks—all right—I may go in, I suppose ? " and in to them, following her rich voice, came a young woman—suddenly paused, startled, drew erect, stared straight at Bliss Henry with a sort of fascinated stare, and her form oddly dignified in its drawing up. Then she seemed to dismiss him—with his stick held up so oddly—and turned to the bookseller.

" Excuse me, interrupting—intruding—have my books come yet ? "

" Yes, Miss Montague," said Haskell, and dived out with her to the shop.

XI

IT was a grey day, not a depressing grey day, but a grey day when the twin church towers in the climbing High Street were washed with shreds of passing mist and stood all day as if seen through tissue paper. And the fields and hills and trees had that look of the paintings of those artists who, having painted dreamingly on a canvas, scrape and sand-paper the canvas. But never mind the process, nor let it disenchant us. The effect is there.

Such was the day. And Bliss Henry, a lover of all days, loved this too, having a lonely, quiet match in his soul for it.

It was difficult for Bliss Henry to work, for mere rejoicing in that veiled day; and perhaps because of something else—but he was not sure of that yet.

It was a day to think of simple, dull, porcelain vases he had seen in curio shops, to think of the grey pools lying solitary in high, unexpected places in the hills above; to think of quiet and strong cadences in the works of the authors whose work came to him in the way that things came nearest

to him, in a mellow and tranquil way, as though they had suffered and yet were fair—and so were fair, and therefore were fair.

He had an idea, as a rule, that he did not care for men who wore rings; but he put on, that day, an old ring that had been his grandfather's, an old gold collet ring of rare make with his grandmother's hair in it. It was in keeping with the day—and his mood. It spoke of old things passed away, old loves, old dreams, and the world drifting on, and told him nothing was real and sure but dreams.

He dressed for the day. He dressed for many things, being not of those who dress but for eating; for making the seeing of a play into a bourgeois "correct thing"; for marriages and deaths. Dressing often for his own moods, he dressed also often for the moods of the quiet nature. So it was that he earned sometimes a name for being "groomed"; and yet he was groomed in his own way.

He was glad, immensely glad in some quiet, inner place, of his consciousness; glad in the grey day, with the hills peeping through, and the grey nightfall, with the blobs of gold spattering it down the village street and dropped here and there across the hazy landscape. The dreaminess eased him, for he had felt a something he refused to dwell upon;

something not easing, in the sudden coming into his talk, in the bookseller's, of that girl who read the *belles-lettres*.

He had been immensely aware of her. Her voice had come to him very decidedly. Their eyes had met very decidedly. Perhaps he had thought it was all because of the *belles-lettres*—tastes in common between people in the midst of a society that had no such tastes. But then he remembered how his heart had leapt and her eyes had—was it challenged him? There was some lure, some attraction. Was it the sense of kindred tastes? If so—all was well. But she had disquieted him somehow, a little excited him. There was a feeling in his heart something like the childhood days' "bubbling" the day before going off on holiday into an unknown green world by some promised sea. He thrust her gently to the side in his mind.

And this grey day helped him. He preferred to walk in a world not realised; the only world that suited him was one not realised.

Yet it was good to know that someone else in Solway must understand these feelings; reading such books she would, surely. But what upset him was that she who, reading such books, must so realise, had somehow moved him.

"A damned magnetic stir!" he broke out, staring out of his window at the gradual dusk, his

back to the table where his work lay, not done to his mind to-day because of the memory of her voice and her presence—of which he had been aware, too much aware.

XII

SUDDENLY he remembered that he had received an invitation to an "at home" at Colonel Jukes's—and had accepted.

To go to an "at home" had never been, to Bliss Henry, a momentous procedure. It had certainly never fascinated him, as it does some; had assuredly often bored, as it does some. But he had not yet reached the stage of quite living his own life, of doing nothing at all simply because he had been asked in a slack moment to do it, and in a slack moment had promised; and, because of his promises, he always fulfilled, trying to look as if he enjoyed fulfilling them.

He managed to get through the evening without much fret, with but one annoyance, and one—well, you shall hear of both these matters.

The annoyance was occasioned by the white-faced bank manager, a thin, pretty young man, with a gushing voice and an ingratiating pose, who seemed to take to Bliss Henry more than Bliss Henry took to him—though probably that was only his manner. If one had not been told that he was a bank manager one would have taken him for a competent and successful shop-walker.

"Someone," Henry thought, "has told him I am an author," for the manager spoke of authors. One he had met, and described him: "With all his travels in the wilds and that droll way—don't you know?—of going off to the wilds so often—don't you know?—he is never *gauche* in a drawing-room."

"Oh, is that so?" asked Henry quietly. "He certainly is not in hunting-camps, in ships' forecastles, in logging camps or shearing yards."

"What—have you—eh—have you met him—eh ——travelled too?"

"Yes—and I had the pleasure of seeing him once in a salmon cannery on the Fraser River, where I was working, and once in a sheep-shearing gang in an Australian back-block. He knew how to conduct himself there—it is quite interesting to hear that he is not *gauche* in a drawing-room. He has, of course, a great self-control." And inwardly Henry thought: "Hang him; he'll think I'm bragging about having travelled—and I'm not!"

Then said Henry: "Pray don't take me for a moneyed traveller. My trip to the West of Canada was a boyish escapade more than anything else. I could not get on as I wished at home, so I gathered together what little money I could and went West. Then I discovered that I could write. I came home with a bagful of notes and they got me a job on a paper as 'Our Special Commissioner in Canada.'

I sat in an attic in Tottenham Court Road writing them up, one a week, at thirty shillings each. Then, thanks to their success, the half-lie became a whole truth, and I was sent off to Australia by the paper in question."

"How interesting!" said the manager. "What was the paper?"

"I never mention it," said Henry. "It had a circulation of 350,000 a week."

The pretty manager had a thoughtful look—he was of those who look thoughtful when thinking. He judged from Henry's expression that there had been some witticism; he accordingly gave a forced smile, very slight, however, lest there had not been a witticism.

Then:

"When are you going to the *wilds* again?" he asked, with an air as of recovering his urbanity.

Henry thought, without showing it. He often looked blank when thinking. He seemed to recognise the drawing-room polite insult and was about to respond brusquely: "When I want to see men again"; but looking at this pretty gentleman, the incompetent manager, he found him not worthy of his steel—not even that pretty gentleman's own steel, as one might say, his kind of lady's bodkin. He just left it at that, gave no reply—just paused as one can do, looked absent as one can do, and then

bowed farewell and passed on among the moving little crowd that laughed and talked so as to be not silent.

This palm-tub affair was not Jukes's really, but his sister's; yet to the sister's credit be it said that she did it as seldom as possible, having no natural bent that way. But when others in Solway did things like that, one had to do them, now and again (if as seldom as possible), just not too seldom to be ignored on the rambling hill street on those mornings, two mornings a week (I forget which), when those who lived in the houses that looked through the trees along the hill came down to town to get more goods on a long credit and pay off a little of the last bill—with a discount if possible.

Bliss Henry, however, managed to get pleasure everywhere. In the mythological hell, I fancy, he might have admired the design of the toasting-forks or the colour of the flames. Here he found a kind of peace in the dull brown expanse, the great polished surface of the floor where the dancers sat round by the wall between the dances, two and two, two and two (a splash of shirt front, and a daub of slight millinery), two by two as it is in the little old ballad about the ark, which he remembered then and which helped him to wear a pleasant smile.

He was not a dancer, and so gravitated to another

room, where were card tables. There were a good many people there too, standing in groups. Music sounded from some unseen place and the *frou-frou* of feet began in the next room, the large room, going on anon into a sort of long sighing of " th " infinitely prolonged. He felt as if he would welcome a drunken navvy fallen by accident into the midst of the assembly, sprawled on the floor, trying to regain his feet—quite *gauche*. He could not play bridge; and bridge partners were forming. But he played whist, in an emergency, and so was soon seated at a table with a trio that he liked—they looked as if they played whist similarly.

Then—as romance writers might say—the strange thing happened.

He felt as a bit of filing might feel, drawn to a magnet; or as a magnet might feel, drawing, by reason of what was in it, though by no will of its own, the filing; or was it two magnets? He simply sagged a little back, or was drawn back where he sat. He turned his head, and as he did so a girl at another table, a girl sitting with her back to him (she who read the books of value in his eyes), sagged similarly and turned her head.

It felt an eternity that he leant there in his chair thus turned to her. He was in horror. He waited for the three at his table to say: " Well—sir? " Then he drew erect, sat foursquare, raised his head,

grew as it were in his chair; and as he came thus erect he heard the girl behind speaking, in a beautiful voice with just an odd thrill in it, and a something else, as if, though speaking to someone at her table, the voice was given an impetus toward him. He drew a little more erect, found his three all examining their cards, just as they had been before that brief by-play that had seemed so far from brief; and then, and only then, the three at his table looked at him, looking up quickly, simultaneously, with just a tinge of question in their eyes, he thought, of course, as if they noted something and did not understand. He wondered if they had seen. He focussed them—and they had a new look at him, as if for the first time.

But then the whist began and it served the intended purpose—it sped the time till one might go away without offending anyone. He went home rejoicing in the open air, the empty little town lying under the night with breaths of air passing through it, and was really quite fatigued enough by the hot rooms to simply be glad to fall into bed and go to sleep in his own room with the windows wide open to the open, clear night, forgetting the last few hours.

At first he had thought that he would not sleep at all. A restless night such as he had known in midsummer London seemed to be before him, the hot

air of the rooms having thickened his brain. But there came, fortunately, to his mind a snatch of a conversation overheard at his elbow that night. A lady with a high voice, and a high colour, and much rustling of skirt, had been talking with a man beside her.

He had heard the man say: "Is that so?—And is he also semitic?"

And the lady had replied: "Oh, no, he's clairvoyant."

That fragment of, clearly, cultured talk attempted boldly, jumped back into his mind then; he tittered—and fell asleep.

Next day, as he sat at work, he suddenly dropped his pen, and rose and walked to the window, and looked down his elbow of village street.

XIII

MISS MONTAGUE was passing.

XIV

BLISS HENRY went back to his table and sat frowning. A commotion was in his veins and it prevented work. Then the maid entered and said :

" Mr. Squires."

" Squires ! " he thought ; and then the bearer of the name entered—and this Mr. Squires, he perceived and recollected, was one of his partners at whist of the night before. Henry had taken him to be a man who killed such evenings with whist (perhaps taken him so rightly), and yet—what think you ?—Mr. Squires had come to invite Mr. Bliss Henry to an " evening " he was going to give. And Henry had come to Solway for peace !

It was after sitting on the edge of a chair for ten minutes that Mr. Squires made his invitation, and he did it so gently that——

" Hell mend him," thought Henry, and accepted.

XV

THE bookseller came to Henry's rooms two evenings later, self-invited, drawn thither merely by kinship; and Henry welcomed him with joy, uncoated him, thrust a chair for him, poked the fire, laid by him the evil cigarettes and the unnecessary tobacco-jar for which we men live, and matches, and then lay down on the rug and hit out his own pipe upon the bars, preparatory to recharging.

The bookseller looked round the walls and at the mantelpiece, lit his already filled pipe and rose, the room being quiet and feeling just as if it was his blissful own, and wandered to the books.

The fire crackled. The author lit his pipe with a coal, which he liked to do because of boyish memories of a tale of an island by Jules Verne, in which some character—Penfield—Pyefield—he could never remember the name, had done so. He had promised himself, in his boyhood, that he would one day so light a pipe. Not only one day had he done it, but often. He had a way of dreaming his dreams true, even these tiny, foolish dreams that had their beginning in a boy's romance and an illustration in it.

"Hullo," said the bookseller, "I didn't know you had published poems," and he took down a small volume and read somewhere, Henry did not know where, for the bookseller faced him. But what the bookseller read was that lyric called "A Song of Silence":

> "If thou possess thy soul in peace
> It matters not what may befall
> From Springtime till the Summer's lease
> Of flowers be o'er and on the wall
> No roses flutter or birds call."

He read on and paused, and read twice the stanza:

> "Even she who sets thy heart aglow
> With love's strange lure, half sad, half gay,
> Must in a little rise and go
> Into the dusk the wonted way:
> What love speech, there, can a man say?"

He wondered if our author were morbid; but, looking on his face and seeing how the leaping firelight made his eyes amazing and showed the wild youth in them, he decided he was not.

The bookseller closed the book and put it back on the toy shelf, and then sat down in the easy chair and looked at our author very keenly out of the corner of his eyes, his head a little turned from a preceding stare at the twinkling fire.

"Been seeing life in Solway?" he asked—or remarked—it would be difficult to say which.

"Yes; well—I've been looking at Solway. I say, who are these men at the corner? How do they live? They are always there; and always their boots are in repair, I notice; but yet they never work. They just stand in a sort of fire zone of expectoration, and sometimes double-shuffle, and now and then chuck a chest and leer at those who pass by. Who are they? How do they live?"

"They! They are husbands of 'factory girls.' You get the word for them in books of that period," and he pointed to the Fieldings on the mantel.

"Oh," said Henry and shuddered; "legalised pimps—eh? More despicable than a Whitechapel trull's bully."

"Well, that's street-corner Solway," said the bookseller. "I see you take it all in. I hear you have already been to see two other phases of Solway life—the retired military, and the distinctly upper ten of the upper middle class." He paused and said: "And you know the bourgeois shopkeeper."

Henry looked up and smiled.

"You would add—compare?" he asked.

"Well," and the bookseller laughed.

"I can tell you slap off which I respect most. I could tell you which I personally consider of most value—if it wouldn't sound like confounded patronage." He paused and added: "I do love your thinking, aspiring, at least desiring, bourgeois shop-

keeper, but—but I don't know that he's typical—the one I know. He may be an exception. And I'm hanged, by the way, if I think the military man typical. He got me aside after a bit at a function of his I was at and told me he was 'most damnably bored.'"

The bookseller laughed.

"But the women like it," he said. "It's a concession to them."

"So he said."

"And what do you think?"

"I believe," said Henry, "that there is a woman who is herself, and not a member, not just an unquestioning, savage unit of a union with unwritten laws and rules by which the world is kept from progressing, a union that, if one questions it, replies that it is protecting its units against man!"

"You must remember your legalised pimps at the corner," said Haskell, with the tone of an admonishing Plato carefully guiding the logical unfolding of an argument.

"I do—they are one of the outcomes of——"

"Of?"

"Lust."

"Whew!" said the bookseller. "I thought you were going to preach annihilation of marriage laws—or free love."

Henry leapt up and very quietly, in a strained

voice, said : " Mr. Haskell, never mention free love to me again, I beg of you—and pray never read into any dream that I may talk, a materialism."

" How long are you going to be in Solway ? " asked the bookseller after a pause.

" Some months."

" Oh ! " and then they both shifted their positions and the air changed somehow.

" By the way," said Henry, " I see there are very distinct classes in Solway, and what ' goes '—to use a vulgarism—in one, at one value, has another value in another class. I mean to say, for example, at the colonel's was one set, at the upper ten of the middles, as you call it, was another set. The few who were at both functions seemed to stand higher at the upper ten of the middles than they did at the colonel's ; got more kow-towing there."

" I don't cotton. Oh—yes ! I see what you mean—I think I do."

" Well, an example will make it clear—Miss Montague, for instance, at the colonel's palm-tub affair was just one of them ; at the upper ten of the middles she soared a little. Though Miss Montague did not condescend she was treated as if she had the right to if she cared."

" Was Mrs. Montague at both ? "

" No, she was only at the colonel's and there, when I was introduced, she gave me such a queer

scrutiny, as if she was measuring me for clothes, and then turned and looked at Miss Jukes who introduced us, and then looked at me again, and then began to talk and turned the talk on to the country and the families of the country until I got a bit fogged. I just bowed to her tangle of histories, bowed and inclined my head and said nothing till I heard her say, at last, '*That was my father*,' and saw her staring at me, so I said : 'Oh, indeed. That is very interesting.' She seemed to sort of change then, stared at me and looked—well, as if she had had enough, or was angry a bit. Another of the women who were at both places spoke to me in the same strain—asked if I knew the country round about, and before I could answer dashed off like this : 'The moor roads are very beautiful—but they have such sharp turns—and the hedges are too high, don't you think ? When I am driving our dog-cart I am always afraid of running over people—oh, but I'd not for worlds let anyone else drive the pony—he's such a high-stepper and has so fine a pedigree.' I said : 'Yes, the lanes do have sharp curves, don't they ? ' and she got red."

The bookseller smiled.

"I'm hanged if I understand what they are getting at," said Henry. "She began again so queerly about the country and seemed to forget what she was talking about and got back again to

her pedigree pony. A lady near—a Mrs. Goodge—leant across and said : ' Oh—Mrs. Stokes, how is your dear daughter ? ' And the amazing lady answered : ' Oh, she is better, thanks—she's getting better. I could leave her to-day to come to dear Mrs. Squires. The poor child is, however, a little despondent—influenza, you know—it leaves one despondent. She begged me to come over in a brougham and not to drive over myself in the dog-cart. It's such a high dog-cart, you know, and she's nervous, and the pony is such a spirited animal. When I drive out the villagers all run out and cry : " Oh, there's Mrs. Stokes in the high, lovely dog-cart with the fine pony ! " ' "

" What did Mrs. Goodge say ? " asked the bookseller.

" Eh—oh, she said : ' Poor child—she has the dog-cart on her nerves also, then. You'll have to get her to live it down ; tell her it's just influenza, and one gets one's head a little turned of course even over a dog-cart.' And Mrs. Stokes answered : ' Yes, of course. It's a very high dog-cart.' And the other lady answered : ' Oh, I quite see that. Well, do remember me to the sweet innocent.' " Henry lay back and groaned. " What does it all mean ? " he cried. " Wouldn't it make you tired ? "

" Or amused ? " suggested the bookseller.

" That depends. If it's harmless, yes, amused.

It's funny; but that sort of thing is all part of the stone that sinks people."

"Helps to weight the pendulum," suggested the bookseller, "seeing you will be serious."

Up went Henry's head and he and his guest smiled in each other's eyes.

There was a tap at the door and the maid entered.

"Colonel Jukes," she said, half terrified, half proud.

The bookseller shifted uneasily, felt his necktie, rose. Henry gave him a quick look.

"Sit down on your stern, damn'e!" he said. "It's only another man."

"Thanks," said the bookseller, and then laughed a chuckling laugh in his throat, and then composed his features and twinkled on Bliss Henry.

Colonel Jukes entered and Henry went to meet him, and took his hand, and then his coat.

"Oh," said Jukes, "you've got company, perhaps I——"

"Come away," said Henry. "I expect you know each other—in such a small place as Solway——"

The bookseller rose. Henry gave him a quick, sharp look—then a quick sharp look to Colonel Jukes and rasped suavely:

"Colonel Jukes—Mr. Haskell."

"Oh, we've often met over business," said Jukes, extending a hand.

They shook hands ; Henry pushed a chair gently to the fire and clapped it, looking at Jukes, who subsided.

The bookseller sat down, thrusting his chair back a little so that it was level with Jukes's, neither before nor behind.

Henry sat down, gently pushing the evil tobacco-jar toward Colonel Jukes, and, shaking the match-box, set that necessity also before him.

XVI

NEXT day was Saturday and Henry strolled down the High Street of our little hill-side town, his eyes gazing out to the far fields (with the white of roads winding amongst them) till he came to the bookseller's shop half-way down that rambling thoroughfare. In the front shop an early yokel was buying, possibly acting on the advice of the Y.M.C.A. Superintendent, who had heard of it, a copy of Smiles's *Self-Help*. Henry perceived him in the act of final decision, eyes pathetically staring, mouth pathetically bulging, the assistant watching him as a terrier watches a rat. The boy was dusting, or at least moving about gently and furtively with a feather duster in his hand.

"Mr. Haskell in?" said Henry.

"Yes, sir."

The assistant, employed upon fussily tying up the *Self-Help*, looked up jerkily between his slapping of the parcel's ends and said: "Oh, Mr. Henry's journals. Boy—over there. Mr. Henry's papers."

The boy, infected by the assistant's manner, fell a-fussing over some papers, with his feather duster under his arm, till the assistant should be free to

come and thrust him aside in the wonted manner and he be able to watch the desired papers being found.

"Yes, sir, straight through," grunted the boy.

Henry passed through to the library. The first person he saw, for some reason, was Miss Montague; but then he had been taken by surprise. He looked quickly to Haskell. Colonel Jukes was in amiable talk with the bookseller, and both raised their heads, turning about at his step, and greeted him, Haskell with his smile and Jukes with: "Ah, here he is! Here," he turned to his sister who stood by, "is the man who was responsible for my lateness of last night."

Henry bowed to Miss Jukes and she gave him a friendly greeting, with a look of mock reproval. Miss Montague looked on Bliss Henry with expressionless face, stood erect, squarely fronting him—and then her eyes sparkled on him.

"You know Miss Montague—I think you met ——" began Miss Jukes.

Miss Montague, with her alert, quivering graciousness, turned from one to the other and said: "Oh—well, I fancy we saw each other at least."

"Yes; Miss Montague was sitting behind me at the next table," said Henry, also looking from one to the other.

"Oh, you gamblers!" cried Miss Jukes.

"I'd prefer whist to dancing myself," Jukes broke in, turning from the bookseller; and then came that bachelorly twinkle, "and a smoke and a talk to either," he added, and then the twinkle increased. To Henry's mind there was some further banter held in reserve; but the colonel half turned back again to the bookseller when Henry looked on his face thus expectant, or prepared.

"If they were all like last night's smoke and talk," said the bookseller.

Jukes returned then to the others, his eyes twinkling on Miss Montague and his sister in a swift, comprehensive glance.

"That's the worst of women," he said. "If only they'd—eh—squat down on one's rug with us and smoke—and rave with us," his gaze flickered halfway to Bliss Henry.

"George!" cried Miss Jukes.

Haskell looked a little puzzled, scenting some banter, but not "in the know."

"I agree with you," broke in Miss Montague, with an odd, supple quickness, a kind of alert spring, as it were, into the conversation. "I like to see a man smoking and at ease; and I don't see why a woman can't keep him company and join in his raves, as you call them."

Miss Jukes's eyes opened wide. Jukes gave an

odd little frown, in his turn, as though of mock seriousness.

Henry felt a leap at his heart. He knew that the bookseller's eyes turned to him then.

"At least there is a possibility of comradeship there," he said, and felt somehow as if he didn't mean it now, as if, in that atmosphere, to be faithful to a former expression of belief in comradeship were to be its dupe.

"Oh, tush—comradeship—my dear man," said Jukes and fumbled for his pince-nez; "is not that a sentimentalist's idea?" His blue eye was both roguish and cold.

"Sentimental?" said Henry. He had been caught on a tender place or he would just have given back persiflage for persiflage, levity for levity, instead of getting so serious. "Do you know what a sentimentalist is? He is one who hunts for a thing he will not possess. If one wants comradeship and gets it," he felt getting back to his own viewpoint, "is he a sentimentalist?"

"I have not ever heard that definition of a sentimentalist," said Jukes with a show of interest. Always when in the company of women his facial expressions were like an actor's—he used his eyebrows, his eyes, his mouth, the canting and bobbing of his head, to aid and accompany talk. "Your argument is right—but your definition, well, it is

not mine," he plucked up and twinkled again, his hand going round and round in a little circle before him, holding the closed pince-nez.

The bookseller withdrew; but it was only a moment's withdrawal to a shelf; he opened a book there and turning to a page walked slowly back, book in left hand, right hand finger-tips daintily turning the pages, said: "Chambers says, '*Sentiment:* a thought occasioned by feeling'—um—'exhibition of feeling. *Sentimental:* having or abounding in sentiments or reflections; having an excess of sentiment or feeling; affectedly tender.'" He looked up and closed his lips tight and scrutinised the company like a parson after reading the text and before going on to its dilution or decoration.

"There you are!" cried Jukes, and was not aware that the bookseller was quietly thinking: "Dear me, little Colonel Jukes is affectedly everything—every expression—every gesture."

Haskell turned about, his face still toward the company, and put the book back in its place. The colonel was staring ahead of him. He felt that the ladies expected something of him. Miss Montague's head swung left and right gently.

"Your definition is your own," fired the colonel after a pause.

"Good!" said Henry. "I shan't try to foist it on you nor on another then."

"And we can't call you a plagiarist," interjected the bookseller.

"Keep to Chambers," said Bliss Henry. "Let's keep to Chambers," he went on; "I'll meet you there. Is it in your eyes an affectation of feeling that prompts me to say I wish that comradeship?"

"You *have* said it then?" asked Jukes, and gave Miss Montague one of his delightful sparkles.

"Let me hint so now, for the sake of——"

"An argument," suggested Miss Montague.

"In the fine sense, to arrive at a goal," said Henry, "not to dispute."

And at the same time Miss Jukes was crying out:

"Now we're going to have an argument!"

"Never mind, one sometimes arrives so," Haskell replied, for Miss Jukes had accompanied her cry with a look at him and a little shudder.

Miss Jukes turned away and looked at the shelves. Miss Montague remained smiling, eager; the look on her face was that of one who knows that after talk is over cometh always laughter and the old, inevitable, amusing story, freshly returned to.

"If," continued Henry, "you think I say so because I regard sentiment—mere feeling—" he underlined it, as it were, "more important than reason, I don't know that I agree. I'd rather be comrade," he plunged on, "with a woman than,"

he took a leap, "perhaps you have noticed the spitters at your corners—the factory girls' husbands —than that!"

Miss Montague did not look shocked. Neither did Miss Jukes. But only Miss Montague looked elated.

"Well," said Jukes, "true! I agree with you there," but he looked round about as if thinking that perhaps his sister might be ready to go, and stuck his pince-nez in his waistcoat.

Miss Montague drew closer. Henry felt a thrill suddenly—the emotion he had felt before in her presence—but whether it was kin with the scent of a rose or was more like a snake's unconscious rattle he did not know. There was no mistaking the fact that there was a thrill, an emotion.

"And I think my feeling is right and my reason is sound," he went on nevertheless, "when I say that comradeship between man and woman is more lasting than what is commonly called—love," he said, and had a difficulty in saying it—something seemed trying to weight his speech. He had a vision of a manacled man with a great ball dragging at his heels.

The odd, magnetic thrill died suddenly; the word seemed to have slain it.

"I agree," cried Miss Montague, and Miss Jukes turned back amazed from the shelves. She had

been listening! "I do agree," cried Miss Montague, "I've always got on well with men. I like men. I say it quite frankly" (the thrill woke suddenly). "I've bird-nested with my cousins over at Bavelaw and enjoyed it far more than skipping-rope. I've gone round galleries with artists and enjoyed it far better than going round with some old dowager with a catalogue and lorgnette. I've even dared the conventions and met men friends in London and lunched with them. Everywhere I go I make friends with men—and I expect I've been called a flirt because of it. That's what one gets—told not to flirt."

Her voice dropped. She looked round. Miss Jukes was at the far end of the shop now, had fled farther this time.

"I've even smoked," said Miss Montague quietly, seeing Miss Jukes so far off, "with men," and she gave the most engaging look to all three.

Henry frowned. Jukes bubbled and muttered, "Oh, fie!" The bookseller smiled affably. Henry, knowing the bookseller now, saw a something behind the smile and wondered what it was.

"I like Mr. Henry's idea of comradeship," said Miss Montague suddenly solemn, almost stern.

Henry was moved again—his heart leapt. He felt he had done her an injustice.

The bookseller said quietly: "And you agree

with him, against Colonel Jukes; you agree that he is not a sentimentalist—even according to his own definition? For to believe in the comradeship, as you do, is to believe in it as an end, not as a means."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Miss Montague a little frigidly.

Haskell, at any rate, did not take her coolness as a sign that he there ceased to be on equal terms and became—her bookseller; it was as though they were still on equal terms and had just explained themselves to each other a little more clearly.

But Miss Montague thought, as she went homeward, how foolish it is to unbend with those below one in social station.

"And yet," thought she, "one can always recover at a press, by reminding them of—of their station. It does not matter."

As for Bliss Henry, he puzzled her a little. She smiled anon to herself. She would see him again. He would not be rude to a woman, she was sure. Indeed, she found him a "shy man." There was not the slightest doubt to her that he was a shy man—that was perfectly clear—and she liked shy men.

"That Mr. Henry is a gentleman, of course," said Miss Jukes, going homeward with her brother.

"He has a slight Oxford accent. One sees he is a man of culture, but—eh——"

"Yes, dear?"

"He's very outspoken. If it were not for his accent I should almost think him vulgar to speak so—before the other sex."

"Oh, my dear, you should hear him before his own."

"I shouldn't like to."

"I assure you it's great. He says then precisely what he means."

"How disgusting it must be!" said Miss Jukes, staring at the cobbled pavement.

"On the contrary, my dear, I find it most cleansing, edifying, purifying," said Colonel Jukes.

"Dear me—why, you're serious, George. What is it?" and her other side, her true side, I think, awoke.

"Yes, of course I am. I wanted at first to egg him on for fun—to stick him into Solway society and then wave a red rag at him, as it were, so that he'd cease to be a lamb and show them the bull he is."

"He has ideas?"

"Yes, and they'd shock Solway. In other words: they'd be the making of Solway if Solway would listen and appreciate."

"Perhaps in a quiet way," suggested Miss Jukes

after some thought, "with a man here, and a man there, if your belief in him is sound, he may be of use in Solway then—in a quiet way."

"Yes; that's the way of ideas. You're not a bad woman, sister"; he paused in the roadway.

"What is it? What have you forgotten?" said Miss Jukes.

The colonel turned a strange, calm face to her, without any bantering sparkle.

"I was thinking about comradeship—and having it—as Bliss Henry spoke just now."

Miss Jukes felt a little lost again and fumbled.

"Oh! Do you think Miss Montague meant all she said?"

"Eh? I think," said Jukes, "that Bliss Henry will find that out."

"You think he's in love with——"

"Ssh! I think nothing about that. But oh, Miranda, if you'd only be yourself, what a woman you would be!"

XVII

SOLWAY was watching Bliss Henry, but he was blissfully oblivious of that. Of course he saw the inhabitants look—they did more than glance; they looked. Perhaps it might not be offensive to say that they stared; but of course he recognised that he was a new-comer—a stranger. The observing of these scrutinies did not lead him on to consider that, as well as Solway being aware of a stranger, Solway was waiting for the stranger to commit himself, to show of what set he was, what he was, to write out a label, a finite label for Solway to take and pin on him and then be content.

The factory girls looked at him, wondering if he ever required a mistress.

The spitters at the corner looked at him wondering if ever he got drunk, and so gave an opportunity to be helped home and blackmailed, ever after, with touching of caps; no wonder that there was a certain roguish, waggish, vagabondish twinkle often visible in the eyes of these men—their only redeeming twinkle; they were then doubtless thinking how droll it was—the way they lived on the moral rectitude of the place.

Not only were they husbands to the factory girls, but they knew those of the shopkeepers who sometimes found a tangle of roads outside the hotels and had to be conducted home and propped there with a "Mum's the word, sir—I won't tell a living soul—gentleman must have his fun, but there's people talk—not that I would, sir. I keeps my thumb on it; and I, bless you, sir, I like to see a gentleman enjoying himself." Looking at Bliss Henry, their outlook on life being what it was, their first thought was that he'd be a difficult devil to handle in liquor, or out of it.

The tardy bill-payers looked at him because he seemed so dem sufficient to himself and yet seemed not in Society. Who the dooce was he? They had a hideous fear that perhaps he was of a better set.

But Bliss Henry did not understand these things, wandered about looking at the Solway that he had the eyes to see, supremely ignorant of the pornographic and idle sides of Solway, seeing rather the changing effects of day and night in the place, its yellow and white and cream-coloured gables and hurly-burly of red tiles and thatch-eaves; seeing the misty or purple hills billowing round it toward the sky, and just setting a-going, in that scenery, his own puppets—not Solway's own puppets, as I am doing.

He strolled thus ignorantly down to his bookseller, with whom he had arranged to "take tea." It being Saturday evening a jostle of girls came and went in High Street, from Bavelaw Road to Mill Lane. That little portion was trod to and fro, sometimes slowly, sometimes in a wild rush, with a flutter of cheap flowers and ribbons, from seven-thirty till ten every Saturday evening, amidst a constant jabber of pattering talk, constant screaming and laughter and humming.

Yes, there they went rushing about two and two, arm-in-arm, sometimes pausing to bow together in convulsions of laughter, sometimes seeing some friend of the other sex and humming to him, in passing, a bar of some popular ditty, such as "When there isn't a girl about, you *do* feel lonely!"

Bliss Henry slipped through the throng and gained the bookseller's shop to the strain of an Italian piano-organ playing, and girls singing, "Stop yer ticklin', Jock," with a sudden suggestion in his mind that there was a French song "Ne me chatouillez pas"; and wondering which was made first—but not greatly interested. He entered the shop, between the hanging rows of monthly magazines and sixpenny, paper-covered prints. Some people were in the shop; so, having been stared at on his way hither suffi-

ciently to be aware of the stares, and having no desire to emulate those whom he had felt uncouth, he stared at a shelf of morocco Bibles and Prayer Books—with furtive, occasional glances to the occupied bookseller, until he received a signal that he was to pass through to the back premises. He considered, dryly, that he had been staring a long while at the morocco bindings, and wished he had been, instead, in front of the Everyman bookcase. He often read the Bible, but not in morocco. He read it as Literature, neither as an ordeal of home life, nor as a state affair in the Church of his land.

The bookseller followed on his heels into the library.

"You may find something to interest you," said he, "if you go right through to the back. I've been buying up a parson's library. I haven't looked it all through yet. Just go right through. I'll be with you presently," and he sped back to some affluent customer.

Henry walked through to the dusty room beyond the library, the entrance to which was cloaked with a red curtain, and looked at the books laid out in rows on the floor: volumes of sermons and theological books in a small row; then two great rows of railway novels—Miss Braddon, Ouida, Guy Boothby, Marie Corelli.

Then the curtain lifted behind him and the bookseller entered the twilit little lumber-room of a place.

"Not much money in them," he said; "but I can stick them in the library. These are the things on which to found a circulating library in Solway. There's a shelf up there—twenty Zolas, and other novels, Vizetelly edition."

Henry took one absently down and turned its pages; then another; then he noticed that on the end fly-leaf of the book he held were page numbers. What might the numbers signify? He took down the others again. Yes—all were annotated in like manner. He turned up a page in a volume so noted, and on the page found a line beside a paragraph—a second clue. He read the paragraph with expressionless face; turned up another page, read the marked part there; then another, then another. His face was blank. He drew a long breath. He looked as though he was going to go no further with this occupation, put back that volume with an air of finality; but suddenly he took out, almost fiercely, another volume, turned up a page or two—a marked page or two—and again blew a long breath.

"From a parson?" he asked.

"Yes—what is it?" asked the bookseller.

"Oh, take any of them—take any—I expect his passages marked in any are as instructive as in this. Yes; that one is marked."

The bookseller opened the volume in his hand and looked at the end.

"I hadn't noticed that," said he and began to consult the parson's noted pages. Then he paused and looked at Henry, who stood staring on him, having not quite given over his occupation.

"God!" said the bookseller.

"'The arts,'" said Henry quietly, "'are about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests.'"

"Who said that?"

"Yeats," said Henry, but more interested in his thoughts than in imparting information on the origin of his quotation—just burst the name out coldly in reply and stood frowning.

"Zola wasn't a priest," suggested the bookseller in one of his flashes.

"More priest than artist it would appear," said Henry, turning to him quickly, like one who had been dreaming. "I don't know Zola—I could never come near him—I never liked the odour of his—eh—temple" (the bookseller smiled), "and so I never went inside to hear him. Still—by the Lord—he can't surely be as bad as this parson makes him out to be by his pencil notes. Yet—

I'm afraid—no—I'm afraid Zola wasn't an artist. As you see, few of the books this parson had are by artists."

Then Henry sat down on the broken chair that the bookseller was wont to sit hunched upon when he bent over his piles of books in that little rear room, sat down and put an elbow on knee, a hand over his eyes.

"Take care—there's a leg loose in that chair," said Haskell. "You've to balance——"

"That's all right. Has this parson a large following?" asked Henry.

"He's a great ladies' man," said the bookseller.

Henry's eyes were full of tears. He felt suffocated. The room had fallen gloomy. As late afternoon fell there came no shaft of sunlight streaming in to make even the dust-motes bright. There was just the old court visible from the window, the mullioned windows staring down dead and heavy; the whitewashed wall looked drab, the eaves above it seemed heavy, giving darkness instead of shelter. Haskell turned up the gas, seeing Henry sitting there miserable—feeling gloomy himself. It was an old burner, there was no incandescent light in this little rearward room, and the ragged flame, most part blue and one edge high and the other low, made the little higgledy-piggledy room look more dilapidated; and as Haskell turned up the light Henry

saw the court without very dismal, dimly and uncertainly seen through the dusty window in which the ragged flame and the face of the bookseller were reflected as in a very aged mirror. The court seemed to Henry to take a horrid dead life, the blank windows opposite, under the eaves, to peer on them.

"I think I'll go outside," said Henry, rising gingerly from the rickety chair doing its last service out there in the room no customer saw. "I feel it stuffy in here, if you'll excuse me saying so."

"That's all right," said Haskell.

Our author went out into the street to find with joy that the night that was beginning to fall was not terrible, but ethereally blue, and vast, and tender; he looked up and saw stars beginning in the immense concave of wonder that dreams always over Solway. A wind was blowing down the gulch of the High Street, down from the hills. He took a great breath of it and then, sustained, turned again into the bookseller's; but he had not to go back to the little rearward room, though I am sure he could have lit it now with his renewed faith so that the ragged gas-flame even would have seemed more a ludicrous aside than one more touch in the making of a dusty and disagreeable impression.

The bookseller had on his hat—the two assistants were hastily covering the tables with their nightly wrappings.

"Coming?" said the bookseller; and they went home together.

XVIII

THE window was open to the night with a tree rustling in it and a stream talking quietly through it, that sound entering with more insistent peace as the night grew quieter. A scent of roses came in, and there was no feeling of slackness or weakness despite all the tushery "poets" have babbled about roses in ladies' breasts and hair.

Henry looked out and saw the roses in the garden and quoted from Poe :

> ". . . while the moon
> Fell on the upturned faces of the roses,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Fell on the upturned faces of these roses
> That gave out, in return for the love-light,
> Their odorous souls in an ecstatic death—
> Fell on the upturned faces of these roses
> That smiled and died in this parterre . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Upon the upturned faces of a thousand
> Roses that grew in an enchanted garden!"

He quoted so, in snatches, just as he recalled the poem, and then strayed round the white room

that this bookseller had made his individual own, and saw a volume of Lang's *Aucassin and Nicolette*, and opened it and turned smiling, as to a memory of old summers with their apple blossom, turned to a passage and read here and there, read in the preface too, thinking how, despite Mr. Lang's elderly and exquisitely scholarly regret that the public will have prefaces, he had yet given out much beauty in prefaces here and there. He read with pleasure Lang's quotation (or misquotation and perhaps improvement) of a stanza from Thackeray's *Old Lamp :*

> " When I was young as you are young,
> When lutes were touched and songs were sung,
> And love-lamps in the window hung."

The bookseller sat with his head resting on the back of his easy chair, feeling that Bliss Henry was happy. Then Henry looked to the piano.

" You play ? " he asked.

" If you wish."

" I do wish," said Henry most heartily. The music, he thought, might heal him of the parson.

The bookseller rose and swung slowly to the piano.

" I have a friend you must meet," he said. " He plays as I can't play. Odd—I have another friend," he delayed at the piano to tell of his friends brought to mind then. " He has left Solway long ago. He

is a composer, you must have heard of him. He comes down here now and then—leaves Glasgow and comes back here without any swagger, and we talk again just as before. He says a piano to him is just an aid—that he hears a whole orchestra ; when he talks of music he may go over to the piano—half sit down in an off-hand way, and more indicate than play ; that's about all you could call it ; and then he says : 'A piano is of no great use. It just helps.' The other man—the man I began about—goes to the instrument and as he sits down he changes somehow. His face, his figure—the whole man changes. It's a thing one can never forget. He doesn't know himself. He couldn't do it if he tried. He goes to the piano as if it were an altar."

He played this ; he played that. He played Leoncavallo, Dvořák, Beethoven. He played wondrously. Henry sat gazing out on the wavering trees and the moonlit garden, seeing the outside world splendid and ghostly, like the land of faery, dazzled by the light in the room.

" Thanks," he said, after a playing.

The bookseller went on ; and then nebulous thoughts were in Bliss Henry's mind : they moved and gathered to some parts of the music, to fall apart again. He was hardly aware that he was thinking of a woman, a girl, that he had known for

years quite quietly without ever thinking how well he did know her. She came to him then, but not visualised. There was no picture of her flung vivaciously before him to make his heart leap—only he remembered her, and poignantly too, I think; but he did not know how deeply he was thinking of her! She was just with him then—but he did not *want* her; or is it *so* he did not want her? Colonel Jukes might have called such a state, whether the man living in it was aware of living in it, or unaware, a sentimental state. But we have thrashed that out—a little.

There was no longing, no "fever of love"; so he did not know—for down the years the symptoms of love have been given as such—so he did not know—that he was in love.

XIX

IN the morning not May but Mrs. Sturge in person brought in his breakfast. He had just strayed into his sitting-room from the little bedroom when she tapped and entered with a swirl, a rush. He felt the swirl and the rush as warning of some explosion; and then, remembering how people said he was imaginative, informed himself that there was nothing in the wind at all, no explosion heralded so. But of course there was; men who are informed that they are this, that, and the other—well, they are generally right!

He was consoling himself with the sunlight streaming through the window on the white tablecloth, the wind blowing the white curtains of the long, low window, when the first volley was fired.

"I'm an honest woman!" cried Mrs. Sturge, striking an attitude of belligerent virtue, and her whole face hard with vinegary rectitude.

Henry looked at her quietly and bowed.

"I'm as straight as the day. Fair with me and I'm fair with you," she cried.

Henry frowned and stared—and sat down and spread his serviette.

Then her manner changed.

"In my house, too! Oh, in my house!" cried Mrs. Sturge.

"Something has troubled you this beautiful morning?" hazarded Bliss Henry, tapping his egg.

"What would my mother say!" cried Mrs. Sturge. "She was the kind of woman that I'd rather die than let her know of such a thing. Trouble! Yes; trouble is the word for it. That girl of mine—oh, the sly slut! Well, I'm not surprised; I always suspected her of being a bad one, with her select ways."

"Run away has she?"

"Run away! God forgive me that I should say it to a man, but she's had a baby."

"What! A baby, Mrs. Sturge! When? I—eh——"

"I've just found it out—last night I found it out, and not a wink could I sleep all night for thinking of the sly puss and all the gentlemen, one time and another, that has been here with me. Not that I hold with reading private letters. I once had a girl that I caught reading letters in this house—reading them deliberately. I gave her the fright of her life. I knew something about her, you see.

I got it quite by accident; and it shows how the Lord's ways go. I found a letter, found it lying on the floor, she had dropped it, you see; and I lifted it and began reading it to see what it was, not going ferreting about anything. It was sheer accident. I just read a bit, and then I saw the letter wasn't one of mine I had dropped, but hers. And what was in that letter made me that ashamed I couldn't give it to her. I just burnt it. But when one day she up and gave me some impudence and made some remarks about my folks, I let her have a bit back. That's the other girl I'm talking about. And here with this girl now—I can't tell you how I found out—it's too disgusting, I assure you, for an honest, God-fearing woman. But what I said to myself was: 'It might have been anybody. A girl like that would blame anybody. I'm glad my dear husband is dead and gone or maybe she'd have——' Oh, Mr. Henry, she'd say anything, that sly puss. I says: 'It might be this friction author that's with me now. If she did the like again she might blame him as soon as another.'"

Henry gave a sigh and said:

"It really wouldn't matter who was blamed, as you say, if the man was innocent. Quite candidly, I may say that May has no attractions for me, physical or mental. All I have observed about her

is that she has very short arms, and a very rolling eye, and that when one does not smile at her she sets the dishes with a clatter and makes a deal of noise." Mrs. Sturge drew up a little, her hands crossed; her lips came together. "And really, Mrs. Sturge, I think I'd rather not hear about the immoralities of your servants."

Mrs. Sturge went white and then stood staring at Bliss Henry, giving him what she would doubtless call a penetrating glance. He remarked it and thought it insolent and disgusting and rudely searching. Damn the woman—and damn Solway!

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Henry," she said suddenly as he gave back her stare; his hand, which had been resting on the table, clenched and unclenched—a sign she understood, it being primitive. "I'm so upset with it all I had to tell you, seeing you are such a fine gentleman." At that she retired.

"The harridan!" he thought. "I expect she's worse than May."

But it appears that one could pick and choose little in the mass of Solway.

Oh, Solway! And this was the place in which he was to find peace! This was the place in which he was to write a charming romance! He knew now that his puppets would never move! The

"local colour" was all right, changeful skies, mutable moors, fields lying in unintentional design of brown and green in the valley; but the puppets would not move. After an insipid breakfast that morning he felt that they were dead, that they had stuck. And he knew that his moral landlady, who had spoiled his breakfast, had killed them. The air of the house told him that he would have difficulty in getting life into them again—he felt that they were dead indeed. It was a disastrous state of affairs.

Then hope returned, a frail hope.

He would go out and tramp on the moors, note-book in pocket lest, up there, in the clear air, his puppets came to life again and talked; he would then have the wherewithal to note their sayings and doings. But he didn't think they would.

He thrust a clean handkerchief in his sleeve, took his stick and hat from the sofa—it was his way to toss them there instead of leaving them in the hall.

And then suddenly the church bells broke out through Solway, making a strange buzzing in the room. He looked round to find the cause of that unpleasant sound, traced it to a flower-vase. At every leap of the church bells the flower-vase gave a discordant buzz. Was it cracked? He lifted it and examined it. No; it was all right. He put it

down again, wondering. And then he found that the vase did not buzz again.

"Um!" he thought, "it must have been the way you took the sound. You seem all right, after all."

He glanced out of the window to see if there was much crowd of church-goers, for somehow he always imagined that people with frock-coats and high hats and satin dresses going to church in Solway, on beautiful sunny mornings when the Border hills were an amazing purple all round the little town, seemed to be annoyed at sight of a young man in leggings, and with a rough stick, going up High Street toward the sky, instead of down Mill Lane or along the Carlisle Road (as the case might be), to church or chapel.

He saw Mrs. Sturge sail forth.

A wind blew in at the window and he decided to go out, not to wait till the church bells had stopped. After what he had heard he did not wish to see May that morning, and she would be up soon to arrange his room. He felt a pity for her. Mrs. Sturge had talked so loudly that he feared May had heard. If the poor sinful girl had heard she might feel ashamed.

He went slowly downstairs, feeling an unpleasant atmosphere around him, nearly fell over a slop-pail at the door of the room below his, and, just as he

did not, heard a burst of laughter—May's—and her gleeful voice crying: "Oh, sir! What would missus say if she saw us?" Evidently May was all right.

He went out and walked briskly up High Street. The bells ceased as he came to the last house; and beyond lay only the road, winding on the moors. All the way up he had been haunted by a feeling that his puppets were dead. Now he felt suddenly that they were not dead. But he, he had lost something, lacking which he could not wheedle them into acting or talking any more. He would be a fiasco, a failure; his romance would never be written, that romance that was to bring joy and beauty to man; he would be a failure, a fiasco; and meanwhile people would go on letting rooms, and going to church, and fornicating, and annotating indelicate passages in inartistic books; reading books that suggested loathsome things; banning others that suggested the possibility that men had souls as well as bodies, and adding to their ban (those of them who were dishonest as well as disgusting and fond of the disgusting) some mean phrase to the effect that we all know that when a man objects strongly to something he feels its lure strongly. Bliss Henry knew all that talk. What a tangle!

He turned round on the hill-crest, the moor beyond hazy with coming rain, and looked down on

Solway—place of peace!—and said: "To hell with you!"

He was to say it with much more feeling ere he was done with it, and able to ignore it.

XX

THE rain poured down, but here on the high land the rain was a joyous event. On he tramped, the collar of his waterproof coat up under his ears, his head raised, his mouth closed, he drawing great breaths through his nostrils. The rain beat on him. The roadway was deep in mud, but he kept to the road, for the grassy verges were all sodden. Round the little spring, where he had often paused to drink in summer, was a pool of dancing water; for the spring lay in a hollow and the moors were draining down that way.

He watched the rain charging across the moor, now like lances, now a white, swirling mist; and he was very happy. Whether in sun or rain he was always happy up here. He thought of that girl friend in London. He had written to her of the moor in summer and had sent her a copy of the fragment he had chanted here before. He thought she would like to be here in rain as well as in sun.

He had met her once on Chelsea embankment, umbrellaless and radiant, her cloak-collar snuggled under her chin, her dark tresses wet; she tilted a little against the wind and smiling into it. It had

cheered him to see her. He must tell her of the lances of the rain, the white mists driving in the cloven glens and scudding across the open moors. He turned about and went squelching back to Solway to change his clothes, rub down, relish tea as only such a day's tramp can make one relish that poison, and then get on with his work—freshly, if not with spontaneity.

XXI

MAY came blithely and quietly into Bliss Henry's sitting-room and went down on her knees before his grate, her head a little on the side listening to his movements in the adjoining room.

Presently he walked in from his bedroom, he slightly irascible, beneath his quiet exterior.

He had had a feeling ever since that hideous Sunday morning of something around him preventing him from doing anything that he wanted to do. He had called himself lazy. He had even told himself that he was already a failure. His first book had been a success. So also his second. Every month now some magazine had his name on a headline as a special attraction, but—there was the " but."

He had come down to Solway, as it were with a boxful of puppets, knowing just what he wanted them to do. He had laid them all out, stood them all up, set them all a-going with, in his mind, the complete whole of their play; and behold, at the end of the first act, when all was going well, something went wrong with the curtain. He could not raise it again.

He tried to hearten himself by remembering what difficulties he had had at first—to get the puppets set out. But he could not hearten himself. Ever since that hideous Sunday his work had been at a standstill. Everything he had written he had destroyed. He blamed Mrs. Sturge. She had just flung a pailful of hypocrisy and sordid parlour-maid underworld of lust over his puppets and then left him. She had left a blight on him. The whole house was inimical to him, the atmosphere atrophying. He came out to his sitting-room and saw May before the grate.

No, he could not say she was attractive. She had a heavy neck, he noticed then, on which the profuse hair hung in a net. She was short, square. Her complexion was pink and white. She had perfect teeth and short, dangling arms, and large breasts that bobbed above constricting stays. He had wondered once or twice if May knew that her mistress had told him that distressful bit of her history. After that Sunday he had felt May, when Mrs. Sturge was at home, rather dejected; our sensitive author felt her dejection, or whatever it was, every time she came into his room. And yet it did not seem like real dejection. It did not awaken sympathy—rather made him irritable; and he was not sensible enough to call himself a fool for being upset by a boarding-house drudge. He had the

democratic as well as the aloof spirit of most poetical minds. One good change, to his mind, was that she was very little inclined now to roll her great eyes as she attended on him. He wondered why the change had come, exactly. When Mrs. Sturge was out May's laugh often rang on the stairs. But as the days passed she regained her bouncing manner, even when Mrs. Sturge was at home.

This morning she looked up and favoured Henry with that familiar roll of eye, as if she felt that she had something in common with him. He had known maids overawed by his books and prints. May seemed not at all overawed. Not that he desired to overawe; but he wondered what thoughts this girl had, as we wonder of a dog or a cat that comes about us.

He looked at her again and saw that she was really very pink and white and that her eye had what the robust worldly call, with a note of admiration, " the come-hither " in it. He could conceive a stable-boy being enamoured of her square, fleshly plumpness. Also, it struck him that if she were garishly dressed she would be like the women one sees in London restaurants smoking cigarettes and looking as though they were waiting for a friend. She looked squarely round and ogled him. He stared at her, deep in her eyes, his face still with

that look as of trying not to show his inner deep distress at the cessation of his capacity to make his puppets move.

"Oh!" she cried and stared. Then again, "Oh, don't look at me like that. You make me feel ashamed!"

And then it struck him that men were truly pigs. He made her feel ashamed! And there were men, it struck him, who, at such a roll of eye, marked her for their prey. He was sorry that he was a man. He regretted sex.

But, May still before him there, he turned from his nebulous philosophy to thought of what Mrs. Sturge had told him; also he thought of how, on the very day that he had heard that tale, he had heard her amorous voice in the room below what time the slop-pail and brooms waited on the landing.

In the manner of a god stooping to earth to aid he said:

"All right—all right! Don't you do anything to be ashamed of and then you'll be all right."

He thought of the hypocrisy of the world. Mrs. Sturge had said that she had heard by accident that someone who was keeping the child had been wanting more money. Well! May could not have much money here, to send on to wherever the

child was housed. He put his hand in his pocket and encountered a sovereign.

"Here," he said, "take this."

"Whatever for, sir?"

"Oh—that's all right. The past is past. Don't repeat it; but don't forget it unless you've learnt its lesson. You need the money, I've no doubt. You take that. Any time you really need money to help you—you understand—come to me. I'll help you as far as I can. The ones that hurt are not the ones that help——" he stuck—feeling that that was perhaps cruel, and he had been trying to handle the subject delicately, lest the poor girl might feel pained. He had heard that even an unacknowledged mother has sometimes an intense primitive hunger for the skulking, unnamed man that is father of her child. But a sudden shadow on her face, as of some selfish thought, made him call himself a fool.

"Remember," he said; "it's for the baby."

"Who told you?" she cried, whirling about and looking up on him, one fore-foot raised half-way toward her breast.

"That's all right," he said.

She gave him an appealing look and a gesture that she felt, the moment it was made, had no effect on this strange man.

She burst into tears.

"I am sad," she cried; "I try not to show it, but oh, I am sad! The baby is a cripple, too."

"Oh! Oh, I am sorry."

"Yes, a cripple. I did all I could to stop it and—the doctor knew when it was born. He did round on me. 'You've made the child a cripple for life,' he said. Oh, he did round on me! I've suffered."

An immense horror took Bliss Henry. He had heard of illegitimacy. But he had never pondered it. He had a look beneath now, as it were. A door opened into a sordid, selfish world of passion.

May cried again, a fresh, piteous outburst.

"I'm fond of the babe," she said.

He could not understand her.

"You tried to——!" he stuck.

"Yes—I did my best—and it's a cripple. Oh, the doctor did round on me! I've had a terrible lot of suffering through it all. I wish it could die! I wish it could die!"

For the first time in his life Bliss Henry play-acted. A hideous thought came to his mind, wakened by a look on the girl's face. He did not pause to question then if it was only his imagination that made him read her face so. He had a thought, a horrific thought, to him. Perhaps because he felt it so horrific he believed that he had read her expression rightly. He acted on the

thought. It was the last speech to expect from Bliss Henry. It was not Bliss Henry who spoke.

"I suppose," said he quietly, "that sometimes if a child is boarded out—eh—— Is the baby boarded out?"

"Yes," and that look on her face again.

"I suppose sometimes children—like that—boarded out—do die?"

"I couldn't manage that, sir—the woman that has her couldn't do that, I know. But I'm afraid to take her away. I didn't send on money for some time and she wrote to my folks at home and they paid up for me and wrote me a terrible letter. So now—now—if I took it away from her and gave it to a woman I've heard of since—if anything happened they'd maybe suspect."

"What?" cried Henry. "It is so then—you'd have it killed for you—and you say you——" he stuck again.

"Well, sir!" she spread out her plump hands, "the poor little thing, sir—it's a cripple—a poor little cripple."

Henry stood looking at her and decided that the evil of the world has neither memory nor imagination. He was to return to that thought later and know how without memory and imagination there is no love. He turned away toward the window, somewhat stunned and, in that mood, somewhat

stunned, in an absent fashion saw his paper lying on the table beside the ink, paper on which nothing had been written for days; or, if aught had been written, it had been written only to destroy.

Here perhaps was life—the thing there, pink and white and square, kneeling on the floor, was giving him real life. Perhaps, he deeply thought, hardly aware of the thought, it was the real life round him that prevented him being able to make his puppets move in their make-believe. But was it real life? It seemed like nightmare. Was it life? Was it life!

A touch on his shoulder recalled him. He turned, and May was at his side.

"You won't tell anyone, sir?"

"Tell! I! After what I've said to you? Of course not."

"Thank you." Then suddenly she smiled in his face, slipped a hand tentatively on to his shoulder—shining tears stood in her come-hither eyes. "Tell me how you knew," she said. "Who told you—who told you? You can kiss me if you tell me that."

Kiss her!

He stared in horror; but his own self he hid quite, dully, horrified.

"Why, your mistress told me, if you want to know," he said in a hollow voice, answering her in

as matter-of-fact a way as he could, since he talked at all to her; but he backed from her and looked with horror on her. She, transfixed, stared on him. Yet it was not at the knowledge of the source of his information she looked so, with something of horror too.

"Oh, Christ! Oh, Christ!" she said. "Oh, for God's sake don't look at me like that! You make me feel—oh—you make me feel ashamed!"

She bent her head and, yes, assuredly her face was crimson, for some reason; then she staggered from the room, squat, and deformed in his eyes.

XXII

BLISS HENRY closed his inkbottle and rose and regarded the litter of his table a moment. Then, angrily, he gathered together the scattered journals and stepped to his cupboard and put them away on the floor there.

He felt as if, willy-nilly, he was plunged into the midst of a world with which he had nothing in common. He walked to and fro in his room, hands in pockets, brow furrowed, distressed.

> "I have not loved the world, nor the world me,"

he quoted,

> "I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
> To its frivolities a patient knee."

He walked to and fro feeling very bitter. He did not want to be bitter.

Henry's memory went racketing through many illogical futilities of argument heard in the past. Cant phrases of privately embittered people who had joined this or that public movement, as young jilted boys often join the army, echoed in his ears; Babylonian incoherencies that, if it be granted that the talkers possessed brains, might more accurately be called dishonesties, so obviously dis-

honest, shifting from base to base; cries *pro* and *con* on matters assumedly religious and civic, which were really private snarls of people who had not got something they wanted (a managership, or a baby) echoed in his ears. But at the moment, because of his own private troubles, he was not able to pity these poor perverted people; he remembered them all with anger.

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me."

And then he felt immensely sorry for himself that, loving the world as he did, its simian inhabitants should make him, from their point of view, "a bitter man," he whose heart was really bubbling with joy, like a spring.

Then his eye caught sight of a *Spectator* and a *Nation* lying on the table and he spurned them into his waste-paper basket.

Of course it was not the journals that irritated him. It was May, the serving-maid; Mrs. Sturge, the landlady; the editor of a paper who had promised to pay on the 3rd, and it was now the 30th—and also his puppets would not move. Why should there be such hideous people in the world when a mere man, Bliss Henry to wit, could create on paper, with a pen, absolutely engaging women who were always beautiful, newly washed, newly coiffed; and delightful, strong, tender men who loved the beautiful women but felt unworthy and

had at last to be told by the heroine gently that they were the dearest, most wonderful men in the world? I wonder if there was anything else wrong with Bliss Henry? He wished he might meet someone with whom he could have a pacific but inspiring talk about life and books.

"Oh, pshaw!" he said.

He gathered together the strayed sheets of his writing-paper and put them in their drawer; gathered together the scattered volumes and ranged them in their places on the shelves and went out for the day, walked smartly up High Street, left behind, with joy, the last cottages; came to the open moor.

He walked with downcast head staring at the familiar grey dust and blue gleam of the roadway. His puppets, as he went, stirred a little; he thought they were almost beginning to act—and then he found himself thinking, willy-nilly, of the serving-maid's outlook on life, of Mrs. Sturge's outlook on life, of—he checked himself; he banished his thoughts wholly, seeing they were determined to be gloomy, depressed ones. He passed on, walking well, across the moor to the foot of Bavelaw hills; went on through the woods where streams trickled, and in their broken banks mica shone in flakes; and the woods were all a-swim with wavering light and leaves. And so on he went to the open slopes, where

only sheep broke the stillness and where were low tombstones half hid in grass, and fallen grass-hid walls, and one stone only erect, an Iona cross, with the mystic letters I.H.S., giving thought of the world's greatest dreamer and of all these ages, of time, eternity, and a dreamer's peace; and the sheep bleating all around, and the august mountain towering behind with a scarf of mist swinging alonging its face. And he threw himself down in the heather and said:

"Oh, my God; my God; it is good to be home!"

XXIII

AFTER a long, long rest he felt better, less lonely. Something of solace had come to his heart. Perhaps he had been really longing for kinship, for a meeting with someone who looked on the world as he did—and saw it a bright, glittering, peaceful and yet invigorating world of blue china and roses and etchings and bicycle rides on long white roads, with a cold tub in the jolly morning and incense of tobacco-smoke at twilight to the stars—and fresh sleep at night with the windows open!

He stretched himself and sat up and saw the curlews flying, and heard them, and chanted his broken fragment of an epitaph or whatever it was:

"I would go back to my own loved hills
When I am dying,
And die to the old, old voice of rills
Where birds are flying—
Flying and crying over the hills."

XXIV

IN spite of the glory of the hills there was no work for Bliss Henry that evening. He had healed himself; but just healed and no more; he had no reserve of peace and joy with which to turn to his puppets and make them live.

He tried again on the morrow to get them a-moving and alive, but could not.

The day without veered and changed, spells of thin sunshine suddenly ended in quick, deepening shadow, bursts of rain; and then came the sun again.

He went out and tramped over the hills above Solway, smiting the thistles with his stick. As a rule he loved to feel the rain on his face, a swirling wind coming now from this quarter, now from that, unexpected and stimulating. To-day he found the ways muddy, difficult to walk on. The wet seemed to go into his bones and chill instead of refreshing him. The intervening spells of sunlight seemed pallid, ill. In the hedges a bird gave a frail, disconsolate twitter—no song. He had fled from Solway to the hills for peace, but he

had, after all, just brought his pitiable condition with him. But he stuck to it manfully, tramped all the way to Currie and had lunch there at the little hostelry that stood grey in the high moors, with bent trees by it and a wind crying in its quaint chimneys. Then he began the return tramp; but the whole rolling chaos of hills spoke of sodden misery to him.

"I shall go down to Haskell's," he thought, "and I shall say: 'Haskell, to save my immortal soul from torment, also to make me fit to work again, play to me, give me again, in music, some peace.'"

He went down the village street with the swing—left, right—of a man who has travelled far, splashed with mud above his knees. It was about sunset; the rain had taken off and a glow filled the west, and red fires banked up there in a wet gorgeousness. The High Street was deserted; one could hear the gutters whispering. The shops were all lit, but hardly anyone was abroad.

He went home and tramped up to his room and changed his soaked clothes for dry.

If he had only lain down to rest the events that followed might not have followed; but he did not lie down to rest. He had made up his agonised mind to go to the bookseller and say: "For God's sake play to me. I am generally strong and quiet.

To-night I am in torture. It is a filthy world, a shambles, a tangle of hypocrisies and maze of filthinesses and their veils, just a great choking tangle. Play, and give me back the capacity to be quiet and to go on with joy."

So he dressed again and went forth and took his way to the bookseller's. The pavements were all white and dry in the wind, though still the gutters trickled from the day's rain. The street lamps were being lit, one by one twinkling to life, the lamplighter coming plodding down the street sheltering his light as best he could—then spark! another lamp lit and fluttering.

"Hail, Prometheus!" Bliss Henry murmured as he passed the lamplighter, and the lamplighter gave him an odd, sidewise glance and then looked back on him.

"Talking to himself," he said; "been drinking maybe."

When Henry arrived at the shop it was to find that the bookseller was gone for two days to overhaul a library somewhere.

"Another hideous parson's, I suppose," he conjectured miserably.

Henry was evidently not sufficient for himself. He had buoyed himself up with the hope of the bookseller being there, perhaps on the point of leaving for home; but that he would be absent he

had not for a moment expected. The place seemed dead. He heard a far-off rumble of a cart, tappings of feet went by in the High Street and sounded as if they were far off, as if his ears were muffled—as if either he did not really exist or else Solway did not.

The girl assistant gave a winsome, sympathetic smile as he took the blow. Very clearly he advertised upon his face that he had come upon a disappointment.

"I shall tell him you called," she said, "whenever he comes back to-morrow."

To-morrow! But his self-centred soul—or to be fair to him—his soul that had been thrust back on itself—felt that to-morrow was ages away, and to-day had been an age—an age he could not have lived through had he not, all through it, had the hope of a little music at the end, a sop, perhaps a peace. He passed out and ran into the arms of Jukes.

"Ah, the very man I was thinking of. I say—come home with me—my sister is away seeing some relatives and I'm alone."

Something said: "No—don't go. Go home. Go to bed. Rest. Say to yourself now: 'Solway is a lie,' and then go to sleep. In the morning you will waken to the full realisation of the truth of your own world—and that without having any sop

of music—all, as it were, off your own bat. Go home quietly, and go to bed and rest."

"Come along, dreamer," said Jukes.

And so Henry went along.

XXV

BLISS HENRY was miserable. He did all he could to cheer up, to look as though he had nothing on his mind, to show a smiling face and debonair manner to Colonel Jukes and Mr. Drummond—a friend of Jukes's who dropped in shortly after their arrival.

Dinner freshened him in a way, but only in the "feed the brute" manner, if I may put it so. He could not get ease. He had to jog himself to join in the conversation, for though he knew what to say on the various subjects discussed from the ox-tail soup to the cheese and celery he, as it were, heard himself talking, knew he was talking quite correctly, but wondered what on earth made people talk at all about politics and travel and all the rest of it, when around one were brutes, just brutes; and possibly even the most debonair people around one were just brutes too, with a veneer on. Kipling's horrid lines about the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady being sisters under their skins, came into his head.

In that odd way that makes one sometimes suspect telepathy to have been at work, that very

phrase was quoted by Mr. Drummond at close of one of Colonel Jukes's stories of India a little later.

Henry roused himself somewhat then.

"Yes," he said softly; "perhaps the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady may be so; but perhaps, again, there are Judy O'Gradys not a bit like the colonel's ladies—and," he added, smiling, "also here and there colonels' ladies not a bit like Judy O'Gradys."

Drummond stared. He evidently did not understand.

Jukes glittered. If he had thought a little he might have understood. He had in him the power to understand. But his excessive fondness for "pulling a man's leg," for "gently roasting" someone, for "having a fellow on" was uppermost. He suggested a removal to round the fire, and filled up two glasses of whisky and soda which he put on a table beside his guests. Jukes did not take liquor himself because, as he remarked, it "played the dickens with his side," but he kept a fair cellar for his friends.

"That remark of yours needs explaining," he suggested. "Don't you think so, Drummond?"

"Well—I confess I don't quite understand," said Drummond, elevating his brows and looking blankly left and right.

Henry wanted to say: "Then damn you, I'm

afraid I can't explain," but he had trained himself, rightly or wrongly, to be always polite when he was a guest—just as also he was always polite when he was a host—there are various courtesies to observe in life.

"Oh," he said, and spread a hand in a slack gesture, "I don't know that it's worth going over."

The end of the gesture brought his hand to the table, and he took up the glass and sat sipping while Drummond broke new ground with some local topic which Henry did not understand, and thrashed it out with Jukes. Henry was rather relieved. A little amused, he observed Jukes's endeavour to make the conversation general. But he was quite satisfied that it was not. He put down his glass and Jukes replenished it. He sat frowning and biting his upper lip. Drummond rose and paced the floor, in a way he had, as though he wearied of sitting; then stood swaying with his back to the fire and his hands behind him—then edged to one side of the hearth and leant against the mantelpiece.

A word on this Drummond.

He quite prided himself on being a Peace-maker. If he heard that two men had "quarrelled" he immediately set out to bring them together, thus often aiding some rogue of whose roguery a simpler soul had grown weary at last—like a worm that

turned. He often managed to make the worm return, and so gave the rogue another chance. It made him feel happy to do things like that.

It suddenly occurred to him that he had been taking up the conversation and talking about matters that a stranger would scarce understand.

"Have you been long in Solway, Mr.—eh—Henry?" he asked.

"No; not very long," said Henry.

"Here on holiday?" chanted Drummond, and took his glass from the table, sipped, and set it on the mantelpiece.

"Mr. Henry is here," explained Jukes, "to take notes—a chiel amang us takin' notes, I expect."

"Oh? Eh?"

"Mr. Henry is an author. You know the name——"

Drummond bowed and looked quickly round to see that he was not keeping the firelight from Henry.

"Yes; certainly," he said. "I was not aware that I was having the pleasure of talking to *the* Mr. Henry—an author."

"You needn't kow-tow to him," said Jukes. "He's not that sort of man. Are you, eh?"

Jukes's tone seemed sweet to Henry. He was glad that Jukes understood the unassuming bit of him. He was glad that Jukes felt that he could speak thus.

"No," he said, smiling; "an author is just a man like any other man, I fancy." Then he laughed. "Not that the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under their skins," he added.

Jukes had a fresh smile. He had at first hoped to see Henry "catch the needle," as he phrased it. Now it would appear that Henry was going to pull Drummond's leg gently. Well—that would do as well. He cared little who was bantered, but he dearly loved banter.

"Where are you living?" asked Drummond.

"Everywhere, I think," said Henry. "I began at 'The Gamekeeper,' and then went to rooms at the top of High Street in one of the old houses. Now I'm just at the bend of High Street, with a view of the moors above and fields below."

Drummond stared.

"And comfortable at last, I hope?" said Drummond, and lifted his glass and looked at the slight fluting on it.

"Well, the view is all right," said Henry, and lifted his glass and looked at the slight fluting on it. "I would move to-morrow if the view was not so friendly," he set his glass down again. "I can see the top rolls of moor and the crest of hills beyond by looking up the street. Looking down I can see the fields and one or two twists of river. And the street—oh, the street is rich with the drollest fore-

shortening of people under the eaves—tops of hats with feet protruding under them. Oh, droll!"

"I wonder if I know your landlady?"

"Mrs. Sturge is her name."

"Sturge—Sturge—no, I don't think I know her," and Drummond sipped and set his glass on the mantelpiece again.

"Then I can tell you a joke about her; at least I hope it's a joke. I call it a joke. To look at it otherwise would irritate me. I heard the other day from a friend of mine—that—" he gave ever so slight a pause and looked at his glass—"she was going to visit friends at Dunecht—and it struck me that she could come this way—by Solway——"

"Yes, surely—a beautiful drive from here. But the coach goes only every other day, you know."

"Yes; I know. I thought of writing, suggesting," he flushed a little, but Drummond did not see that—only Jukes, "suggesting that she come this way by an early train, have a view of Solway, and then go on by the coach at four o'clock. My landlady happened to come up when I was thinking of writing to her, and I said: 'Oh, Mrs. Sturge, I suppose if a friend came up with me some day next week you could give us lunch and tea?' She looked at me and said: 'A friend! Do you mean a lady friend?' I said, 'Yes.' And she said: 'No; not in my rooms. I can have sisters come to see my

gentlemen, but not cousins. I'm suspicious of cousins, and you can't tell them by the face; but a lady friend—alone—oh, no!' "

Drummond's face seemed always to wear an astonished or expectant look, and Henry did not see in it any suggestion that his story fell not as he imagined it necessarily must. So he went on:

"I said: 'What?' like that; and she said: 'Na, na! You may be all right, Mr. Henry; but I've to think of what the neighbours would say.' I said: 'Good heavens, Mrs. Sturge, you're joking!' And she said: 'It may be all right in London, but this is a small place and'—you wouldn't guess what next!—'human nature is human nature, and we're all John Thomson's bairns.' "

He ceased and awaited the outcry of derision—laughter, or short, angry outburst.

Drummond was very erect and proper.

Jukes was solemn and twinkling.

"What did you say?" asked Jukes.

"I? Oh, I said: 'Madam, we are not, distinctly are not, all John Thomson's bairns.' She went away and left me—but I didn't write. I really felt I couldn't ask my friend to come to a house with such an atmosphere."

Drummond coughed.

"Pray don't think me prurient, sir," he said; "but I fear I must say a word on behalf of this

estimable woman. There is a word to be said for her, you know."

"Oh?" said Henry, and looked up, all astonishment.

"Well, sir, I quoted just now that the colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady were sisters under their skins——" Drummond paused.

"And," said Henry, as Drummond seemed to have more than paused, seemed to have taken it for granted that he had sufficiently explained himself and need say no more, "I tried to explain the way in which that is true; also the way in which, far more, it is not true. I also quoted my remark that we are not all John Thomson's bairns. However, pray proceed," he said, for Drummond had begun to make a stammering sound and to wave his hand. Jukes, who knew Henry a little at least, found a new note in his voice then. It was dangerously suave, he thought.

"Well, sir, I see how you are irritated," said Drummond kindly, leniently, benign; "but think how things would go if you, with all good intention, had lady friends to see you alone. Think! Think how others, not honest and good, if I may say so, would take advantage of that——"

"Oh, let them talk—for *me*, that is. I know what you mean. I've seen a little of Solway. Let them talk—for me."

"I don't mean that. I mean that the serving-girls, for instance, might say: 'The master has a girl friend to see him alone. Why can't we?'—and then—well, you know what the majority of people are——"

"Yes," sighed Henry. "Colonel Jukes once informed me that——" (Jukes glared frightened at him, wondering what on earth he had given information of at all apropos; but Bliss Henry went on relentlessly; he had been drinking Jukes's whisky, which Jukes had been glad to see, hoping it might render him amusing) "informed me that when a man and woman were left alone together in Solway for two minutes——"

"I protest!" cried Jukes.

"——they immediately thought of what Shakespeare calls incestuous pleasures," continued Bliss Henry, and pursed his lips and raised his head a little.

"They were your words!" cried Jukes.

"It was your statement," said Henry, and blew smoke. "However, Mr.—er—Drummond, you were saying?"

Drummond looked from one to the other and then:

"Um—well—this is rather straight talking; but of course we're all men here—no ladies. I would say, also, about this young lady friend of yours,

that to invite her to—er—' digs,' as they are called, is not quite the thing."

Henry was going to cry out " Why ? " when Mr. Drummond went on :

" Especially if there is anything between you."

Henry sat erect.

Jukes was gentleman enough, as the phrase is, to feel a pang, as host, and grew serious.

Henry remained calm a little longer.

" What makes you think that ? " he said. " Anything between us ? How do you mean ? "

" Well, I mean inviting a friend so. Your landlady doubtless thought she was what, in her sphere, would be called your ' young lady.' "

Henry felt as if he would suffocate or faint. He wondered if perhaps he had drunk too much—he thought he had almost the symptoms of apoplexy now. It was only, however, the strain of restraining himself that affected him so. He would let himself go presently. In certain cases one should be silent —in others, speak !

" You mean that if we were in love it would never do ? " he asked, quiet, speaking slow, distinctly. He wanted to make quite sure of Drummond, to have him state his case so coldly that there would be no shuffling afterwards when the reply came.

" Thanks, yes—I mean that then, of course, it

would be quite wrong and I should agree with your landlady."

The girl he had thought of thus writing to, in a moment of unquestioning turning to her, was she of whom I have already once mentioned he had had a thought; you remember—it was while the bookseller played one night and the stream crooned without. He saw her now in his mind's eye—remembered their many meetings in London—their many talks. God! How all this would pain—aye, pain—her.

Jukes thought the storm was over, thought Henry was going to make no reply, had decided to leave affairs at that. And despite his love of banter he was glad. But no.

"Why?" Henry's voice exploded.

There was no answer, but a shrug from the swaying Drummond.

Said Henry "Why?" again.

"Well, sir," said Drummond, "need you ask why? Is it necessary to press the point?"

Henry rose.

"It is," said he. "I shall press the point. I have never met you till this night and if I see you to-morrow I am hardly likely to recognise you. But I shall ask you this question: Do you mean a worse thing than all? Do you mean to say——" he stuck, gasped, gave then a low cry, there is no other

way I can describe that burst of soul: "What? Shall a man lust after the woman he loves?"

All three were now on their feet.

"I put it," said Henry, with a great restrained gesture in the silent room so strangely charged with a deeper thing than emotion, "not as a fact. I would not speak of this girl to you. Indeed I declare to you that I do not love her. I put it all theoretically to you—as I presume a gentleman would have it—in the way in which I presume you quoted about the colonel's lady in a retired colonel's house—you being a gentleman—I put it theoretically, not personally. I ask you: Does a man lust after the woman he loves?"

Jukes stood flustered. Drummond fluttered on the hearth.

"Really," he said, "your language is——"

"Sir," cried Henry. "Your ideas are worse than my language. Your ideas are such that I would not stay a moment under the same roof with you. I withdraw from you. Evidently you are too far gone even to desire my help. I withdraw. I wish you farewell. I shall never see you again—here—or hereafter." He turned and bowed to Jukes.

"Colonel Jukes, I must crave your clemency for this scene—which was none of my seeking. Thanks—I shall find my way out. Pray don't leave your friend. He may wish to talk to you of colonels' ladies

and Judy O'Gradys." He bowed deep, and then drew up and looked in the eyes of this Mr. Drummond who had assisted at such a scene as never in his life had he dreamed of as possible.

But Jukes came quietly to the door with Henry, helped him on with his coat. Then he did an odd thing. He clapped Henry's shoulder as he took his hand.

"Come again," he said. "Come soon. Come when my sister is at home. I hope you are not offended."

"Offended! I hope I have not offended you," said Don Henry.

"Not at all—not at all. I can't ask you to stay after the way you've been insulted, however. Good night."

He caught Henry's hand again. The smile he gave then was not of banter, but of goodwill.

XXVI

BLISS HENRY walked down the broad carriage-way, his feet crunching emphatically in the gravel; then, with his hand on the side-gate he looked back, and the thin light from the hall that had lit him forth went out. He saw Jukes a moment against it, as though bowing at hazard into the unseen. He waited a moment that his eyes might be better acquainted with the dark, windy night; and then, seeing there was scarce any light in the sky, and as he saw, dimly, the borders of the road, deeper shadow of wall and hedge, he plunged forward down-hill.

Branches creaked, and leaves rustled in a subdued immensity of sound; blown leaves flicked his face as they were harried through the dark by the whirling wind. He plodded on, his occasional brushing of the wall due chiefly to the darkness and the uneven way. The worst of having touched liquor at all is that the sceptical may suggest—or the introspective may even suggest to themselves—that one who had not touched anything more heady than water might not, at least, brush the wall, even in a dark and blustering night, so fre-

quently. But it was, in all honesty, a dark night and an uncertain pathway.

There was relief for Bliss Henry when he came to the first lamp above Solway, for then he found that his occasional divagations had been due wholly to the dark. On that point I think one may trust his verdict; for he was his own severest critic. It was an immense relief, and eased him of a growing irritability toward himself, to find that, as to the legs he was blameless. As to his mind—he was still aglow with a sense of the fitness and logical sequence of his remarks. He saw that he had gone to the root of the matter, with impeccable insight, and acumen such as one associates with the legal mind. As to the emotions—a flurry of wind about him, a sudden departure of a cloud and breaking forth of the moon, settled their drift. He looked up and gazed, in the dusk, with glowing countenance, on the moon, as he posted down-hill, passing here and there pillared and gated entrances. When he arrived at the first houses of Solway proper, apart from these dotted upper houses, a quick patter of rain came over him—the moon was hid—revealed again—hid again—anon revealed.

The rain came in splashes and he held up his face to its wet freshness with delight.

A sudden great joy came to him; nay, an emotion beyond joy. The touch of all the sordid

things that he had been encountering seemed suddenly to be torrentially washed from him, and he stood stock still when that sense of newness came to him.

The place was under a great plane tree, the trunk of which jutted out into the road, it being partly within and partly without the wall of its garden. The wall was about as high as his waist, and above that were railings set in it. He looked through and saw a row of gardens and trees and dotted shrubs and houses beyond, all standing dark.

Below twinkled the street lamps of Solway, splashed about on the slope and marching up toward him in flickering lines. Over all were the flying clouds giving to the moon the aspect of a fleet courser, a courser that did not progress, a kind of dream courser, a kind of squirrel on a wheel—not that such a simile was in Henry's mind.

Still he remained motionless where that sense of being washed and blown clean had come to him.

I know not how long he stood there tasting and living that immense joy. He stretched out a hand and leant it on the abutting plane tree; and at that contact a new joy came to him. He clapped the wet, rough trunk. He looked up, called to by a grand, subdued, and yet in its way stormy, dancing of the leaves over him. His eye pierced through

the wavering spaces of the billowing top, and he saw again the speeding and motionless moon, the blown stars.

A splash of rain came and went.

It was so windy a night that the pavement was drying ere the next splash came. He saw it spotted black with the raindrops—saw it lightning.

Then a high, amazing, kind of victorious laughter of the leaves broke out again over him.

He looked up rapt and joyous.

"Oh tree!" he cried. "Oh tree!"

And at the sound of his voice came a consciousness of himself sole, in the world empty save for flying wind, and leaves, and rain, and the flying moon.

"Oh wind among the leaves!" he cried.

He fumbled in his hip pocket and drew forth that inseparable companion, his hopeful notebook. The nearest lamp gave sufficient light for him to see at least which pages were blank; and straightway he began writing:

"This is a sad thing that a man must say
Farewell to the blue waters and white moon,
To dawns across the sea, to nights of June
And red Septembral sunsets; pass away
Beyond the song of rivers and the play
Of wind among the grasses on the dune;
Or, on the wall, of sun and leaf-shade; soon,
So soon, farewell, the wonders of the way."

He had had a slight pause at the blue of waters and a leap of his heart at the white of the moon. Now he had a longer pause.

Then the tree gave a great glorious outcry.

Yes; the inspiration at that moment had at least momentarily failed. But when the tree cried again tempestuously with the wind, he gave a glad cry—upturned his face again.

He lay against the protruding stem, part embracing it as far as the wall would allow, and waved up into the tossing top.

"Oh tree!" he cried. "I love you more than all things." Then he saw again the moon—a cloud whisked away from its face—and "Oh moon!" he cried. "Oh tree and moon!"

A squall of rain splashed him.

"And rain! Oh rain!" he cried, and in the joy of it all he then took off his coat and jacket, all in one magnificent gesture, and thrust them hanging between the railings a-top the wall.

He took his notebook from teeth that had exquisitely and delicately held it for the disrobing, and turned a page lest the rain should smudge the octave he had written; and then with a sudden concentration and gathering of his brows, as when he sat at his table at home, he plunged into the sestet:

"Yet it may be that he shall understand,
When to the ultimate august silences
He is led forth by an immortal hand,
The reason why to leave these things he grieves,
And grieveth not to leave all else that is ——"

He felt it in his whole consciousness—he could leave all—all Solway—all life—all—all—even Haskell—and then a pang came, a pang that sobered him for a moment—a pang born of a nebulous thought of a woman living on and he one with the wind in the leaves, and the twinkle of stars and the flying of clouds. But he returned to his book and wrote the culminating line of his sonnet :

"O sun, O moon, O wind among the leaves."

And then he drew a great breath, and blew out a great one from his nostrils—and took off his waistcoat and put it with the other discarded raiment—and sat down on the pavement with his back against the tree and chanted his sonnet to the vasty and uninhabited night.

He ceased, and sat rejoicing in the feel of the rain on his arms. He was just turning up his shirt-sleeves when came a voice :

"Hullo, mister ! Ye'll be getting cold. What are you doing there ? "

He looked up and saw a constable before him, looking down on him heavy and coated.

"Writing a sonnet," said Henry. "But, oh, far more than that! Living! Living, sir! Cleaning my soul!"

"Writing a what?"

Henry rose and with a compelling gesture conducted the constable nearer to the lamp and produced his notebook and read, holding his book close, subconsciously thinking that the writing was bad, but glad that it was at least decipherable and that there was no hitch in his declamation:

"This is a sad thing that a man must say
Farewell to the blue waters and white moon,
To dawns across the sea, to nights of June
And red Septembral sunsets; pass away
Beyond the song of rivers and the play
Of wind among the grasses on the dune;
Or, on the wall, of sun and leaf-shade; soon,
So soon, farewell the wonders of the way.

"Yet it may be that he shall understand,
When to the ultimate august silences
He is led forth by an immortal hand,
The reason why to leave these things he grieves,
And grieveth not to leave all else that is ——
O sun, O moon, O wind among the leaves."

"There's a fine sound about that," said the constable, when the reading was over and the poet waited in silence with an air that seemed to say: "If you appreciate, it is a good sign of you.

If you fail—well, I am sorry—but you have heard something of high value."

"Did you do that?" said the scrutinising constable.

"Just now," said Henry, and waved his hand lightly toward the tree—to which he retired again, the constable pacing slowly back after him.

"Well," said the constable after a short but sufficiently sympathetic and decorous silence, "you'll have to be getting home now."

"Home!" cried Henry. "I am not going home. Constable," the moon was disclosed again, "I am going to live for ever—like the moon," he added.

"All right, all right," said the constable.

"And here I am going to stay to-night."

"All night?" asked the constable.

"Till morning," said Henry.

"Well," said the constable with a kind of sigh, "I've to go up a bit farther. Maybe I'll see ye when I'm coming back."

"I'll be here," said Henry. "Constable—would you care to hear the sonnet again?"

"Thank you—I've heard it once."

"I can speak it to you," said Henry.

The constable tarried, and Henry spoke it again. He began it sitting, and then was smitten with a sense of the lack of reverence toward the phrases,

and rose at the second line and stood reverentially speaking the words in a fashion he conceived as not without much of the splendid and fitting.

There was silence at the close and Henry thought his constable a man with some fine strength—a godsend in Solway. The constable looked on him long from the deep shadow of helmet and brows and doubtfully remarked :

" You'll be catching cold."

" I'm all right," said Henry.

" Very well," said the constable and continued his slow way up-hill. When his footsteps ceased Henry looked up again to the plane tree top, caressed the stem and sat down again in his old posture. Now and then he looked up and waved—now to the moon—now to the tree—now in a comprehensive wave that included all the dome and all the tossing trees of the night, his heart full of he knew not what wonder. He felt another poem in him, one that he had not the power to write, and he began to feel the sonnet a poor affair by comparison with that unwritten but felt pæan in his life, somewhere, he knew not where—head, heart, in his very veins, they being filled from his pumping heart with surely not blood, but with immortality and splendour and glory.

Suddenly again a voice :

" Hullo ! Are you not in bed yet ? "

It was the returned constable.

"Hullo, constable! Back again! Pass on, please—pass on—I would be left alone with the tree and the moon."

"Ah, well," said the constable, "I've to go up a side-way here next. I'll be back again," and he moved on yet once more and disappeared in a side shadow.

But when he returned the poet had departed. The constable walked to the wall to see that he had not by accident left his clothes. No—they were gone also.

The tree was alone, waving and singing in the night—Oh, sun; oh, moon; oh, wind among the leaves.

XXVII

THERE was a little buzz of voices in Haskell's incandescent-lighted library, and to our extravagant author the place was of course a *salon*, or possible *salon*. A brightly-lit book-lined room, with one or two people in it talking—how could it be otherwise? He forgot the quality of the books for one point!

Haskell, moving in a corner with that odd air more of master of the assemblies than of your obsequious servant, saw him enter. He noticed that Bliss Henry gave a quick smile in response to his, and then looked away, as though not desiring to interfere with business. Haskell, glancing again, after that recognition, took stock of Henry in the openly surreptitious way that is possible to one who wears *pince-nez*, aided by the sheen on the glasses. He thought that Henry looked remarkably well and wondered if the author had been busy; he had not seen him during these two days since his return from "arranging a gentleman's library."

As a matter of fact Henry had been indoors, self-prisoned, for shame, and when he had come out

that evening had faced the streets prepared to hear a whisper through Solway : " Now you know him. He's a drunkard."

Henry moved along the walls glaring at the books, and then a voice said :

" You *are* engrossed, Mr. Henry."

He was indeed engrossed, not just pretending till his bookseller should be free to talk ; for he had found an old calf-bound Jeremy Taylor in a side shelf with other books—not similar inside, but as to binding—probably from some merely moneyed person's house, where all the books were bound in skin from the same family of calves, or something of that kind. And now he was reading of the tomb of Ninus.

He turned and bowed—to Miss Montague, who stood behind him, tall, stately, in a dress of a greyness that made her eyes more wondrously, witchingly grey, with three daffodils—the stems cut short—just showing in the folds of her loose grey cloak, a blue scarf over her hat, tied under her chin—giving our author a thought of Arnold's

> " Paint that lilac kerchief, bound
> Her soft face, her hair around :
> Tied under the archest chin
> Mockery ever ambushed in."

She had had to speak to him to attract him. It pleased him, turning at her voice, to know that

he had not *felt* her presence, not felt that " damned magnetic stir " again ; and so he was wholly pleased to see her. Ah, if only he had had such as she to talk with, the thrill-less she, the she minus thrill !—instead of Drummond—the affair of the plane tree had never happened ! As he turned to Miss Montague, seeing her open, direct eyes, and their dancing clearness, he thought : " I wonder if by any chance she knows." She did not—but the story, I am sure, would have amused her immensely.

She held her hand tentatively to him and he took it and bowed. Here was the *belle lettrist* who would have understood all Henry's side of the Drummond *v.* Henry business—or so he believed, for he did not yet know her. It was splendid to meet her to-night—and in so frank and friendly a way. She healed him—but with none of that magnet and filing emotion of which he had been conscious before.

He looked at her very candidly. Then he was suddenly a little disturbed to observe that she became oddly nervous. Her queenliness seemed to be suddenly a strained matter. What ! Had he been rude in his manner of greeting ! She looked left and right at those in the *salon* as though afraid they were staring, her first ease shaken. To put her at ease Henry turned his back fully to the

wall, that she might face him, so that if any stared in the queer way of Solway when a man and woman stood talking (he had observed that way of Solway), he could return a quiet gaze on the starer that did not even say, "Well?"—just a quiet look of unobservance and the starer would look away and Miss Montague need not feel put out—not seeing these looks, the knowledge of the possibility of which, he at once quietly opined to himself, had made that sudden nervousness of manner, she being of a refined cast of mind.

"Here's a beautiful old book," he said, and she looked at it quickly, almost snatched it, the way one snatches a life-belt. Then she regained her ease.

"What is it? No; I don't know him," she said. "I've to come to him yet. I know he has wonderful passages. Fancy finding this here! Haskell is bucking up—oh, I hope you don't mind slang?"

"Why—I like it. How bucking up?"

"I mean he is buying books that there is not a great demand for—not popular. Look what I have found. I've been making discoveries here as well as you."

"Ah! *Ballades and Rondeaux. English Odes*—that's a fine little volume. Do you know Patmore's *Unknown Eros?*"

"Um—yes. It's beautiful music, but very vague, mystical, I suppose. I like it, of course, but——"

The boy appeared from the shop and Miss Montague held out her hand for the books he brought her.

"He knows not to put them in paper unless I ask," she said, taking them from the boy. "I've just been getting Laurence Hope's poems," and she held up the volumes.

"Yes—I know them. They are interesting."

She frowned a little.

"I don't object to erotic verse," she said. "Do you?"

"Everything is interesting," he said.

Her eyes blinked quickly and her lips went tight.

"Some people," said Miss Montague, "think if there is anything about fleet white limbs, or brown limbs, in a book of poems that the poetry is bad. I hope you are not like that. I don't think you are from the things I have heard you say."

"No," he said. "No—I'm not like that. I hope I look far deeper than that."

Suddenly her eyes had a fascinating beauty for him, looking deep and questioning in his.

A sudden squall of rain rang on the dark window that looked out on the little court with the gnarled tree in the midst of the cobbles and the old houses round it.

"Oh," she said, "what weather! I'll have to get these wrapped up, after all. What weather! It deludes the poor birds. To-day I found a dead blackbird by the roadside. I stopped and buried him under a great lime tree and put one of these flaunting daffodils on his grave to match his yellow beak."

The magnetism he disliked died—fled out at the phrase.

She put up her hand to arrange the daffodils. It was a beautiful phrase, he thought—and a beautiful thing to do, to bury the bird and deck its resting-place. Here, he felt, in the beauty of that phrase, was something to live by, something of what he had sought to ease him of the hideous wounds of Solway.

Miss Montague gathered her books and skirts and smiled, nodded—not bowed—"Good night," glanced round toward Haskell, "Oh, he's engaged," nodded again to Henry and went out into the shop.

Bliss Henry put the Jeremy Taylor back in its place.

The crowd thinned. Haskell came to him.

"Well, stranger, I see you had a talk with Miss Montague just now."

"Yes."

"I'm glad. She reads; and I daresay you could

find things in common. She would be bucked up, I expect, to hear you."

"To hear *me!*" said Henry, he not feeling particularly great.

"Certainly, oh, humble egoist."

"She—why, she said——" and Henry quoted the lady's words of blackbird and daffodil. "Why, she's great—I'm—I'm immensely——"

"Oh—that'll soon pass," said Haskell.

XXVIII

THAT night Bliss Henry again found the capacity to work. He took up his puppets on his return and went on gloriously, getting down just what he wanted. What was sordid around him had been thrust back by a beautiful phrase. He worked till long after midnight, and then, arranging his papers neatly and quietly, acting rather as a deft surgeon arranging his instruments, after one clean and successful operation and preparatory to the next, than as a neurasthenic author who is supposed to throw about disorder and ink, he went to bed. There were no sounds through the open window save the running of a night wind in the valley and far-off crowing of cocks—here, there, yonder, in scattered farms of the plain—speeding the night.

The next morning he rose early, tubbed, and had already done a good day's work when his breakfast was brought up.

The table was strewn with his papers. He cleared only a corner and said : " That's all right. Just set there."

He hardly looked up to see who had brought

the meal to him, so intent on the world of his puppets. He had ceased, at least for the time being, to know the need of *living down* the atmosphere which had atrophied his powers. He was not aware that it was May who had arrived with the tray and that she was a little exultant in her manner; so he was not aware that, at his ignoring of her, the exultation faded and she departed, heavy, squat, stolid, crushed.

He went on working after breakfast; and when Mrs. Sturge came to clear away the dishes he was again deep in the world of his puppets. She gave a peremptory tap, such a tap as would have irritated him immensely a few days ago. As he now was he just cried out: "Come in," and, not looking up, went on with his work, not aware that it was Mrs. Sturge who entered and that she had come in very stately and defiant.

Her jaw dropped a little at sight of Bliss Henry's self-sufficient pose. She stood a moment stock still, her mouth open—then she cleared the table.

Once or twice, at this employ, she paused, looked at her lodger, frowned, seemed about to speak; but he worked on, his pen going surely over the paper. She departed a little more quietly than she had arrived. She came back presently and passed through to his bedroom to make his bed—but she could not disturb him. She even seemed

a little fearful of doing so, went rather subdued behind his chair toward the bedroom.

Yes; Bliss Henry had a grip on the life of his puppets. Day after day he worked on. His days were glorious. Each day he tramped up High Street and forth on to the moors for a couple of hours; each day he wrote another substantial portion of the book that Solway was to have given him peace to write; whether Solway helped or hindered he was certainly writing now. His funds were, of course, sinking; but he had one or two small commissions for articles and the like. It had been his intention to pause in the work when it was half written, and write these articles; but so much of it must be done first. Now, thanks to this new peace, he was going, after all, to be able to carry out that intention, which he had feared had been all blown to the winds during recent days. Yes, at last the book was half written—and despatched, so sure was he of it, to his typist in London.

How the second half was to go on was perfectly clear in his mind, so clear that he had a great conflagration of abortive pages, a great tidying up, and laid his papers out afresh and took a new pen to do the "pot-boilers."

And then, coming home from one of these tramps that kept his physical frame well for the

sake of his mind, a little old woman (whose wont it was to come on Sunday afternoon to the house to get the scraps of meat left over during the week) bobbed a curtsey to him.

Henry had heard a deal of this little old woman, for Mrs. Sturge was not the woman to give away scraps of meat once a week without talking about it, if possible, every day. Amazing it was what a variety of occasions would serve for a harangue on that philanthropy. If it were not noted in the book that Mrs. Sturge imagined God kept for her it must assuredly have been recorded in His gramophone record many times—but perhaps Mrs. Sturge would think a gramophone with her name on it in the shelves of heaven not so fitting as a Book, blasphemous perhaps!

"Excuse me, sir," said the wrinkled and smiling old dame, and Henry paused and touched his hat.

She gave him another bob and smile.

"Excuse me, sir, but I'm an old, old woman, and I like you, sir, for your fine carriage and your beautiful eyes; and I have a word to say to ye."

His brows elevated over his "beautiful eyes" that he had not known were beautiful. He remembered more the despite of men than the praise—which he generally feared was flattery—and he had been told that "he had a bad eye in his head, a

bad, wild eye," once, years ago; he had been sorry and had deeply hoped it would improve.

"I'm an old woman," said the dame, and Henry's hand went a little to his pocket and then, feeling that was not what she wanted, his hand paused and—

"No, no," said she; "it's not that I'm after, sir. It's something to tell you, sir; and now I really don't like to tell you. But why shouldn't I? It's that sly puss of a girl here, sir; she told me such a thing of you, sir, the other day. Told me, sir, her own words, that you had been trying to take liberties with her."

"What?" He looked horrified, and then smiled a stupid smile.

"Just what I said, sir," cried the dame; "and I told her that if I saw your bonnie face I'd tell you what she said. I knew that she was lying. And when I said that I'd be after telling you on her she showed it on her face that she lied."

"Silly girl!" said Henry. "And I gave her a sovereign," he mused more than uttered. But she heard.

"Whatever for, sir?"

"Because—because I am still able to be disillusioned," he spoke to air and waved his hand.

"I don't understand," said the old dame. "But anyhow, sir, I've told you what that girl said;

told you because of your beautiful eyes—and a boy I had once with eyes like them. I think it's right you should know. If she'd talk like that to me she'd talk the same to anybody ; and Solway talks, sir."

"Oh!" cried Henry in disgust, "oh—well!" he decided with hard voice and forceful toss of head, "if servants will talk filth they'll have to talk it and, as Solomon said, one need not give heed to what servants say—just let them say."

What sort of soul the menial had he did not pause to consider. It was his way to consider these things ; but this was too small, and paltry, and disgusting for him to go psychologising and dissecting. He had work to do—*big* work, *the* book—one or two "pot-boilers," besides, to keep him in funds that he might write *the* book, the great book, full of beauty for those who would have it.

The little old woman bobbed and tittuped away with aged agility ; she looked, he thought, as if fearing a return of his hand to his pocket where was his money. He liked the old wrinkled dame. She had sweet old eyes.

He walked into the "digs" determining to say nothing. Why fuss about servants who, well treated, took advantage of that—and became *menials!* He would dismiss it!

Then suddenly: "Tut! The only way is to treat them as menials!"

With sudden vigour he rang his bell and when May answered it, with head in air, which settled it, said he:

"I wish to see Mrs. Sturge."

"Sir, sir—forgive me. I——"

"Your mistress!"

Mrs. Sturge came up at once, bonneted, and cloaked in a cloak with hanging bits of black glass and ribbon about it, little bits of black glass like prisms; she had just returned from afternoon service.

XXIX

"MRS. STURGE," he said, "I give you a week's notice."

"And whatever for?" she cried. "Is that a way to treat an honest woman? If you was being a Christian and going to church instead of hatching plots to annoy an honest widow on her return——"

"A week's notice," said Henry, "from to-day."

"A fine man you are to take on such airs!" Mrs. Sturge drew terribly erect. "Ever since you found out that that poor girl of mine had got into trouble you have treated her scandalously—scandalous! It's cruel, I call it, to a poor unfortunate girl. And now I've got a word for you—now that you've given your notice. Oh, I know the kind of man you are, coming home drunk and insulting a woman."

"Eh?"

"Aye! You may well look as if you had to be careful. You came home here drunk and came into my room half naked—to think that I should be heard with such a word on my lips! And what would Solway think if they heard such a story?

Answer me that! You came into my room with half your clothes off—an honest, God-fearing, respectable, married woman—and widow! What would Solway think if I told them that? And I shall now! I'll tell them! I'll tell them the kind of man you are in a house with a respectable widow and a maid-servant."

"When was this, madam?" asked Henry quietly.

"Six weeks ago, and never a word from you since; just sitting there over your papers and books—you that think yourself a man with brains—brains!—you come into my bedroom and then treat me like dirt; aye, more than a month ago it was, if *you* don't remember; six weeks, pretty near."

"And I came into your room?"

"Yes, you did! And I have a witness. That poor girl is a witness to it. May was so flustered that she came running in to see what was wrong. I sent the poor girl away and got you quiet to your own room. I couldn't have a young girl like her see a man like that."

At this juncture May appeared in the doorway, her hand upraised as though knocking in air.

"If you please," she said, when Mrs. Sturge turned about, "Mr. Haskell to see Mr. Henry."

Mrs. Sturge stood triumphant.

But so did Henry.

"Come up! Come in, Haskell!" shouted Henry. "Tell him to come up—come in."

Mrs. Sturge stood erect, but not triumphant, rather nonplussed.

Haskell entered and looked amazed. May retreated a little way—just out of sight.

"Mrs. Sturge," said Henry, "will you repeat your story before Mr. Haskell, please?"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Sturge. "I——!"

"Then I shall. You say that six weeks ago I came into your bedroom half naked——"

"You did! You did!"

"Six weeks ago——"

"You did; I swear it. You bring this on yourself, remember—and if you have so little shame left—— May! May! Come here. I have a witness. Come in, girl; don't stand back. It's all right with me here. Come in." May appeared again at the door. "Didn't Mr. Henry come in drunk about six weeks ago and come into my room and——"

"I don't know, Mrs.—please——"

"Don't know!"

May hung her head and then: "Yes."

"He was drunk?"

No answer.

"Do you hear? Don't be afraid."

"Yes."

"There you are!" cried Mrs. Sturge.

Haskell stood smiling foolishly and blinking; Henry, with head in air, looking exceedingly well indeed, radiant, bright.

"Good!" said Henry. "Now, ma'am—you hear this, Mr. Haskell—now Mrs. Sturge," he raised a solemn finger, "what do you think Solway would think of that? Nay, more; what do you think Solway will say when it knows? I came into your room half naked six weeks ago and—observe—*I am still here.* A fine state of affairs, Mrs. Sturge, for an honest, married widow! Oh, Mrs. Sturge!"

Mrs. Sturge tried to speak, but only made a clucking sound.

"Six weeks ago," went on Henry, "I came into your bedroom and—Mrs. Sturge, are you listening?" She tried to speak, but again in vain. "I am still here," declared our author; "and what do you think Solway would think of that, ma'am?"

Mrs. Sturge was collapsing.

"You! Oh, you wouldn't tell such a thing, would you?" she stammered. "Think of your own character, sir—as a man with a character to lose for respectability for yourself."

"I do not think of myself as a man," said Henry, "and with a character to lose. I am a brain. I am a symbol."

"Eh?" Mrs. Sturge was feeling behind her for a chair.

"I don't know," went on Henry thoughtfully, "but what it is my duty to tell Solway, for the sake of decency, about you six weeks ago. I have a witness to the event and another now to your own statement. You can't deny it. It would be quite futile to try to deny it now. I have Mr. Haskell here for a witness that you have admitted it. May is a witness." He paused, and then: "Mrs. Sturge, here's a fine story for a respectable married widow!"

Mrs. Sturge sat down, lay back, choked.

Haskell choked a little, too.

"Six weeks ago, madam—a naked man——" Henry's voice went on.

"Half naked," said Mrs. Sturge, and fainted.

May stood in the doorway like dead meat in a butcher's shop. Haskell stood grinning at nothing, like an effigy. Henry stood with his left hand in pocket, right hand toying with his thin watch-guard, head up, smiling like a cherub.

Then Mrs. Sturge came round.

"Are you awake?" asked Henry gently but with determination.

She sat up and said: "Oh!" and her eyes rolled.

"Mrs. Sturge," said Henry, "I have altered my plans. I shan't leave you—I'll stay on."

She rose like a plucked turkey after combat.

"And, Mrs. Sturge!"

"Yes?" murmured Mrs. Sturge.

"You'll be very civil to me," said Henry, "and attentive, and very careful about your tongue—remember; the tongue is a small member, but the root of all evil. And if you are all these things I won't tell Solway that horrible story about you and a naked man that you have been harbouring—for six weeks! It's a shocking story, madam!" Her eyes bulged. She looked apoplectic. "Look after your mistress, May!"

May advanced, took her mistress's arm, led her forth; they passed from the room. Haskell and Henry stood in the middle of the room looking at each other with changing expressions on their faces, expressions that beat me to describe.

XXX

THE postman's knock sounded, that double knock that always beat a tattoo of hope and preparedness for Bliss Henry: if anything joy-bringing came—good; if nothing helpful came—it was always one more post gone past, one more tattoo sounded toward the last tattoo! To be alert at the sound of a postman's knock is evidently common to all folk; Haskell also, at the sound, had the air of expectation; and then, considering that he was not in his own house, the expectancy, for himself, suddenly died out.

May came pattering upstairs with that odd, quick step of brutish thew and heavy coquetry, tapped, entered. Droll how May's manner changed with the weather in the house! She was now defiant, bold indeed Haskell esteemed her, with a mental note of her manner and a thought that he would not have a servant enter a room so. He would teach her manners. He had a puzzling thought: "Why did she enter so?" But no—he dismissed that. It was just like Bliss Henry to allow a servant to flaunt about in a fashion that might suggest, to the average observant person,

that her master had cheapened himself with her. Haskell was annoyed at the suggestion in his mind —annoyed therefore at the girl.

"The bitch!" he thought, in his—er—coarse way. "I wonder if I could hint to Bliss Henry what people might think! Oh, faugh! He's all right! What does it matter!"

She tossed down half a dozen letters on the table, swung about to go out.

Bliss Henry looked at the letters, his mouth puckered. The top letter was in the handwriting of that girl friend whom you heard him mention—talking theoretically with Drummond at Jukes's house. To see it cast down so stirred him!

"May!" he said sharply.

She swung back, looked on him. But he did not yet look at her.

"Yes?" she said, standing at the door, still with that flaunting air, but forced now.

Then Bliss Henry raised his head.

"Come here," he said. "Take these letters up. Take them to the hall, put them on the salver and bring them in on the salver."

She tossed her shoulders, shook her hips, half turned as though to go; but then her eyes dropped a little from staring on him. And she felt that he was looking at her, and she came to the table and lifted the letters.

"And, May!" His voice came oddly.

She looked up at him again, but now only as high as to his waist.

"Say, 'Yes, sir,' to me! I have been too lax with you, I see. Evidently you can't stand my treatment. Now, go and bring these letters back on the salver."

There was no word when she went. Henry stood stroking his chin and looking out of the window. If he thought at all about Haskell it was only to conjecture (careless, however, of Haskell's possible opinion): "Very likely he thinks me a petty, domineering ass."

Haskell, of course, thought nothing of the kind. He stood with eyes that seemed to see nothing, stood there patient, heedless looking, his manner much after Henry's, till May returned and advanced with the salver—but, oh, he was observing.

May found Henry still looking out of the window; and now he turned and lifted the letters leisurely. The girl stood a perceptible moment, then tossed her head and whisked about.

"May!"

She turned.

"Say 'Yes, sir,' that I may know you hear."

"Yes—sir."

"You thought I should have said 'Thanks'

just now. I used to say 'Thanks' at first when I came here, used to say 'Thanks' when I took letters from the salver. I continued to say 'Thanks' when you discontinued to use the salver but handed me my letters. Not that I didn't perceive the change—only, as I say, I'm lax. I am going to put that right now—with you." She looked a little awed. "There was really no need for me to say 'Thanks' at all, ever. But now you are going back to the use of the salver and I'm not going to say 'Thanks.' May!"

"Yes, sir."

"Be always careful. Remember your position. You understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

She stood still.

"That's all."

She went away and closed the door—quietly.

"It's damnable," said Henry, "the way one is forced to behave. Sit down, do."

"I don't think I shall now. I had only a little while to stay and it's gone now, pretty nearly. Anyhow, I don't know that I need say what I came to—eh—hint to you."

"Dear me, this is mysterious!" said Henry, but seemed not extremely interested in the mystery, seemed as if he could live on without it being explained.

"I don't think you need it, after all," said Haskell. Then: "By Jove! By Jove!"

"What?"

Henry seemed more interested.

"I've seen a change in you to-day," said Haskell, nodding.

"Oh, well," he almost apologised, his voice a little petulant. "They force it on me."

"Of course they do! I'm in sympathy with you—very much. I'm sorry though—I'll never live up to you. I admire it all. I believe I could help you—for I understand you. But I'll never live up to you. I'll always say: 'Oh, well, what does it matter!' when it comes to the bit. But, oh, God, I admire you. You've turned over a new leaf." He paused, meditative, seemed about to speak, then to change his mind and keep silent. Then: "I wonder if you'll carry out into Solway what I've seen you begin here in your own room in Solway," he said.

"If they force it on me."

"If you stay long enough they'll force you," said Haskell. He stood half smiling, half serious. "It has its comic side," he said; "but it has a very deep, significant side, too."

"Do sit down," said Henry, for Haskell had leant against the wall.

"Not now. I've my business to attend to—I

just looked up—that's all. How long are you to be in Solway ? You told me, but I forget."

"Till I'm ready to go," said Henry with quiet vehemence. "I said about six months, but I don't know now. I'll go just when I wish."

Haskell looked gleefully on him and squared his shoulders, as if inspired by him.

"Good-bye—I must go. Drop in," he said, and was off.

Henry presently opened his letters : one from that friend that Mrs. Sturge's morality had made him not invite to go to Dunecht via Solway ; one from his publisher, a kind letter, enclosing two introductions to people in Solway—"lest you feel lonely sometimes." There was also a returned manuscript ; also there was a cheque for a manuscript that had been accepted eighteen months ago, and appeared six months ago, payment of which had been obtained by his solicitor, who enclosed a note from the editor which remarked : "I have been ill or would have attended to this matter earlier. I am sorry Mr. Bliss Henry has brought you into this matter. There is really no earthly reason for his having done so."

After he had read the letters he went to the window, opened it a little wider, stood gazing away down the High Street over the vista of green fields into the blue distance, with its two shining

twists of river. With calm, then, and a sense of power such as came seldom to him with so great certainty, he turned to his table, seated him, and began on the second part of his book, in which were the beauty and colour of Solway—as to the moors, and the air, and the white gables, and the red-tiled and brown-thatched roofs; in which were his own puppets doing romantic, and exhilarating, and beautiful things—not the real puppets of Solway, as they are in this book of mine; but I have already hinted something to that effect. He went on quietly, calmly with his work, aware only of the wind blowing in to him from the quiet world of moors and rivers; quite untouched now by what he found atrophying in the "atmosphere" of the house, and had, by the way, as you may guess, knowing him as you do, called himself a decadent, a neurasthenic, all sorts of names, for feeling.

Personally, I believe he had felt that atmosphere atrophying because he was clean, like the hill-wind, and that he did not feel it now because he had blown it from him, and so made himself stronger.

XXXI

"YOU look wild and sad," said Haskell.

It was Friday evening, and Friday was a quiet day in Solway. The back premises of Haskell's shop were vacant; the books, both fresh and faded, those handled and those not handled, were all standing mute round the walls, with the incandescent light glinting on the gold letters on some, on the red splashes on others—the bright light making the dilapidated appear more sordid, the clean more shining.

"I am," said Henry, "sad, wild, disgusted, sick."

"You've been seeing more of Solway," suggested Haskell, "since last I saw you."

"I've been going out a bit more—visiting, I mean."

"That's it, is it? I wondered whether you were working or doing that. I had hoped you were working."

"I have been working. My book is three-quarters through. But everything is wrong."

"Wrong? Everything? Come now; I see by the *Publishers' Circular* that your last book is still

selling well," and Haskell indicated the table where lay *The Clique* and *The Publishers' Circular* and *The Bookman* and *Clegg's Directory* and the odd implements of his trade.

"Ah—but there's nothing in it," said Henry dismally.

"What!" ejaculated Haskell.

"All frippery! All frippery! It is of the literature that is for the idle to read on sofas with a cup of tea on a little table by their sides, or in a lounge chair at the club. So is the one I've got so near an end. There's the dear old central character, made a little extravagant, so as to stand the limelight, as those publishers' readers phrase it who are more commercial than artistic and hag-ridden by the phrase 'What the public wants,' instead of remembering that what the public wants it wants only for a week, and that when authors give *themselves* to the public, instead of *giving the public what it wants*," he snorted, "they live for years instead of weeks. Well—I'm what the public wants in a refined sort of way. I've given it, once again, the quixotic character who does no harm and is looked upon with smiling affection, and at the end is married to a delightful puppet, a rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair, some Irish lace, some French frills—and just a little scent, not too much. Oh, a delightful creation, and all my own!

He's an author this time. In *The Fan* he was merely a moneyed 'out-o'-work.' They are of a leisured class, or supposed to be leisured, my puppets, taking their leisure. A leading character harmlessly quixotic—such a dear man!—witty, epigrammatic; *in* a panama and sunshine, and with a cigarette; well-bred, humorous. Love in a garden! Tea in the garden, with sunlight in the silver, and a bird in the ilex. The leading lady a smiling dummy! My books have what is called 'charm'; but I'm a bit sick to find who reads them. Certainly the censor will never ban them, certainly there is not a phrase in them that the libraries will say may offend readers——"

"Hang it all!" broke out Haskell. "It's something to charm tired hearts. You don't want to teach, do you?"

Henry looked as if he had received a blow below the belt. Then he recovered.

"If I charmed the striving," said he, "gave them a little rest to go on again, I should be happy; but I'm only charming those who live to be charmed by any charm, good, bad, or indifferent. And to be a clean charm is not much better than being a dirty charm—to those who live only, solely, to be charmed—diverted. God! I'm going to hold the mirror up to life a little more in my next book, I assure you."

Haskell blew a stage sigh.

"What's the cause of all this depression?" said he.

"The cause of the depression is that I find I am known in Solway," said Henry coldly, "known among the leisured class. My books have been put in Mudie's boxes for them; and so I am known among the class that come in and pay you half of an old account and ask for discount. Have you ever visited any of them?"

"Never; I'm a shopkeeper."

"Ah, well, I'll tell you, just as I see it; but it's not as I write it—the leisured life in gardens with a peacock on the lawn. That's the dashed thing," he swerved in his intention, got back to his own grievances; "my puppets are for the amusement of these people. I am a kind of soother. I am in the same world as the man who massages them, or their Turkish-bath man, or their *coiffeur*."

"Nonsense! They don't treat you like that."

"Not quite—they want rather to pet than to patronise. They say: 'We have read your last book and have been charmed.' But I know. I would fain say: 'I am your humble jester.'"

"I wish you would get to what's worried you in Solway."

"What has worried me? It is the unpublishable fact that I am a whore, a prostitute. *That* has

worried me. I have been to half a dozen 'at homes' in Solway since I've seen you and—oh, fame!—they seemed all to know me—the people at them. I'll tell you the kind of people. It is hardly likely that high literature can be appreciated by a society that drinks wine—my dear man, it's a solemn fact—till it is bleary. I've seen whole rooms of people playing cards, or talking—and music being played—and wine going round—and all bleary, sir—bleary; and all dressed, oh, all dressed! And I know the men. I've seen them. Oh, worse—I'll tell you that too. I'm read by blasé, immoral men, who perhaps lighten their immorality by pseudo-advancedly calling it 'a-moral'; by women who, preparing for their 'at homes,' have to see not to the cleanliness only of their underwear but to the bows and ribbons on it (and what librarian would allow that truth to be told!) lest some other woman should flaunt more *lingerie* than they, and they be unable to vie with her in that respect. There's no getting away from that. They are humbugging and hypocritical. Prettiness they see and can't see beauty—hence such a phrase as I heard one lady laughingly fire off. 'What a good girl So-and-so is,' said someone. 'Yes,' said this lady, 'she's rather plain, you see.' And I looked at the girl they were staring at and found that she was not pretty, but beautiful. And she was the only girl in that room

whose garters I could not give you the colour of. They'd call her *mock*-modest, I suppose. You see, they are slightly educated and know phrases to lie with. I think they hate her."

"Or envied her?" suggested Haskell.

"I hope," and Henry beamed, "that it was envy—that is more hopeful."

He considered that new thought a space and then went on, looking a little more relieved:

"What I was going to say is that, when these people read, any so-called refinement they may seek must be a refinement, as it were, of *lingerie*, not the other refinement, which is strength. I know I'm called a literary man, a man of letters, a man with a decent style. It's worse than if I wrote *Molly Macquire, the Mill Maiden of Pillport*, for *The Peoples' Perodical*. That sort of thing gives—which should please you—a worker a little forgetfulness. But as it is, I'm a gold-tipped cigarette; I'm a box of chocolates—the high-toned kind with alcoholic and sickening stuffs inside; I'm a high-heeled slipper with a silver buckle; I'm the pendant tassels on a society lady's drawers; I'm an aigrette; I'm a swinging chatelaine; I'm a scent-bottle and a powder-puff; in short, my dear Haskell, I'm a bawd. The only consolation that I can get in the reading line for myself, the only ease I can get in the reading way, is in Shakespeare's sonnet:

"'Tired with all these for restful death I cry;—
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
And captive good attending captive ill:
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.'"

Haskell looked with great wide eyes on our author. I think he was glad he was a bookseller and not a book writer.

"Yes, I know what you mean. You must feel bad," said he.

"Bad! What makes me feel so very bad is the last knock I have had. At each of these 'at homes' I tell you of there has been a man, Dodge—Tommy Dodge they call him. He rather hung on to me as a literary man himself! He's——"

"I know. He's editor of the *Solway Sewer*," and Haskell snorted. "Hung on to you!"

"Yes. He writes songs, I hear, music by So-and-so, words by T. D. Dodge. He's presented me with a copy of one of his volumes. He's a great favourite with all the ladies. You know the way

he jumps about, and bows, and draws erect, and fires compliments, and when he sees *they* don't go down, veers round on the other tack. I don't understand the married women. They seem to like him sitting at their feet."

Haskell was staring. He felt that something bad was coming. He was glad he was only a shopkeeper, after all, not of the leisured class.

"Go on," he said. "Do you know *all* about him? You certainly see things. You observe."

"You know?" cried Henry.

"Go on, and I'll see if I know, by living here, what you know just popping in on us."

"All right. It's this—he left along with me last night. He had been carrying cake to Mrs. Jones and turning the music for her, and he sang one of his own songs about a lady's handkerchief, which he wished he was. Then he sat down again in a ring of ladies, all sitting with their toes pointed at him and gently moving and twiddling. I wondered if I was prurient. I didn't like the way he looked at the women. They didn't seem to see anything wrong, so I fancied I must be prurient. They sat, with one leg over the other, laughing and talking, and their slippers slipping off a bit—oh, damn! Haskell, I'm *not* prurient."

"Go on."

"Well—this Tommy Dodge came down with

me. He was clearly a favourite. I heard someone say what a decent little fellow he was. We were not a dozen yards down towards town when the factory girls, going home, began passing us—those that live up in that row of cottages, you know—and——"

"What?"

"They all knew him."

"How?"

"In different ways—thank God. Some winked to him, some said, 'Hullo, Tommy!' others threw up their heads and glared at him. They are primitive but——"

Haskell quoted: "'The colonel's lady and Judy——'"

"Don't quote that!" cried Henry.

"No—it's not quite true. It's a half truth," said Haskell. "I'm sorry."

"Thanks. Well—there was one of the girls quite young. Do you know what this curled darling said about her?"

"Something filthy."

"Indeed it was. I must tell you that just as we met these girls he calmly remarked: 'That Miss Robinson up there is an innocent little thing. Sweet, simple, unsophisticated. She'd need gentle handling to break in, I should think.' I didn't like the way he said it, but made no reply. He turned

about after ogling the young factory girl, she, giving no response, just walking on looking straight ahead, and said—no, I can't tell you! I can't tell you! He took it for granted, oh, God! he took it for granted that I—— Took it for granted, do I say! Why the man never dreamt that I mightn't like that sort of talk. I thought to fell him to the ground. Instead, I held myself together and said quietly, to see if he had a decent spot to touch at all: 'Her figure somehow reminds me of that Miss Robinson.'"

"Lord! What did he say?"

"Say! Why he turned his dancing eyes to me and gave a leer and began appraising her figure—for its innocence and freshness, as he called it. Oh, why—why—oh, to hell with him!"

"Put him in a book!" said Haskell.

"In a book!" cried Henry. "I don't write about life at all. He's not for a book of mine. There are some men write only of the underworld of life in books; hideous, gripping books; but one feels they can't be true. He'd do for them. But life is not all that. Then there are some men write of only the ideal side——"

"Like your books!"

"Mine! Oh, mine are fairy tales; they're too airy and dainty to call them even the happy side of life. What I should like to do is to write a book

about life as it is, dark and bright, proportioned as like life as possible. I don't think that would be a bad book, or a book that anyone worth listening to would ask me to cut bits out of; for I believe in Emerson's phrase—'Light is greater than darkness.' But I don't know—oh, I don't know! If I did write like that I suppose I'd be read by a certain section for the dark parts alone; and those who don't wish to look on the dark parts (and they have my sympathy) perhaps would feel that I marred the fine parts by these dark parts. Oh," he broke out, "I wish to God I knew! I wish I could feel myself writing something of value to art and life—not just writing relief from tedium. Still, I'd rather write to do that than to titillate idle women or to titillate soldiers and sailors and serving-girls, whose classics are *Maria Monk* and certain parts of Holy Writ. The worst shock I got of late, in thinking of art, was to see that girl May reading—what think you?—Hardy's *Tess*. What did she get there? Oh, if only I was sure that in the main I'd be read for good!"

"'Light,'" suggested Haskell, "'is greater than darkness'." He paused. "I remember once how I felt when my sister was out somewhere and that Dodge convoyed her home. *He* goes everywhere. She said he had been so charming, so courteous to her. I was sick. I could have vomited to think

of his courtesy. But she soon said, one day: 'I don't like Tommy Dodge.' She had seen him again, I suppose, and his courtesy had turned into something that she felt was unpleasant." He paused again, and then: "I often wonder what would happen if the girl he is engaged to be married to should——"

"What!" cried Henry, "engaged to be——" and he stuck. "Oh, no more, Haskell, for God's sake, or I shall pray the High and Mighty Gods, if They do exist, to give me not for certain (if there be such a thing as an after state), to give me not an after life in it—but just death, death and no waking—never any more knowledge of aught—for I, too, am a man built as this creature we have been discussing."

"Cheer up! Cheer up!" cried Haskell. "I don't agree with the proverb that we are all John Thomson's bairns." Henry had a quick flash of light in his eyes—remembering that night at Jukes's. "The very state you are in, because of having seen that set in Solway, shows that we are not all John Thomson's bairns. And—take my tip—a good many girls do loathe Tommy Dodge, but they speak civilly and sweetly to him because they see what he is so well that they'd be disgusted with themselves for sitting on him—it would look as if he needed sitting on."

"Oh, what a relief, Haskell!" cried Henry. "I hope you really believe that! I hope it's true! And, no—as you say—we're not all John Thomson's bairns. Some of us have 'lain burningly on the divine hand.'"

And then both turned about suddenly and faced the door, for a voice said:

"What a phrase! Who said that? Is it your own, may I ask—or where shall I find it?"

XXXII

THE voice that came in on them was that of a youth who stood smiling in the doorway; as to his face, it was like that of Chopin; as to his carriage, unaware of his arrival, and at first sight of him, beholding him full in the doorway, he standing there a little smiling, radiant, expectant, Henry thought that he was somehow like a flower.

Henry looked at him with a special joy—and had an indescribable sense as of already knowing him, though perfectly sure they had never met—knew him, knew he was the manner of man for him; and also that some people would think this man effeminate because of that face—and that form reminiscent of a birch tree or, as I said, of the slim, stately delicacy of flowers.

Haskell met the new-comer with a kind of reticent, constrained exuberance; and then stood in an off-hand fashion after the hand-shake. Henry, taking note, knew they were friends.

"Let me introduce Mr. Queen," said Haskell, "Mr. Henry. I have spoken to you of Queen," he added to Henry; and to Queen, as the two shook

hands: "I have written to you of Bliss Henry being here."

The sensitiveness of the face told Henry that this must be the musician friend that Haskell had mentioned; not, he fancied, the famous composer of great scope, who ran down now and then from Glasgow, but he to whom the piano was as an altar.

And he it was. And these three were all suddenly at peace and had the feeling of tasting a great moment in their lives.

"Why, it's late!" said Haskell, aware of the silence, and walking towards the front shop.

"Yes," said Queen, "I noticed the tables were all covered over for the night out there."

"Come along home; come along home. All right, boy. You can go, I'll lock up. Come along you two," said Haskell, and seemed eager to be gone.

"I say," said Queen gently, "I wonder if your boy would care to go to the station for my bag. I have the left luggage ticket." Henry was reminded of his own arrival in Solway. "I left my bag till I could find if——"

"As if you didn't know that always you can put up with me."

The round-faced boy, waiting outside the door with his "penny dreadful" (purchased not, of

course, from his master, who did not sell such books, but from a shop in a side lane, a funny little shop, with two long pipes in the window, old chocolate losing its gloss, and two shapes of potted head), the jolly, laughing, old-fashioned youngster bobbed forward, with his old-young face a-grin, and touched his cap, piped : "Yes, sir, with pleasure." Evidently he knew Queen of old, liked him. The three all smiled at the boy's eagerness.

"All right," said Haskell; "Mr. Queen will give you the ticket." And then again, "Come along."

"Here you are, Cupid," said Queen, handing the ticket.

And then the three went home.

It was one of the greatest evenings in Bliss Henry's life in Solway; and one such evening atones for a hundred others, and inspires for a hundred to come. To chronicle the sayings of a Tommy Dodge is comparatively easy; but who can chronicle silences? The silences were the chief beauty of that night. They were not the aggravating, watching, furtive silences of such an one as Tommy Dodge—if ever he was silent; they were the silences of rest. His silences were more holdings of breath.

Haskell, once or twice, before he understood that Henry and Queen had already—as he would have

expressed it—cottoned, tried to make talk; but that endeavour was as unnecessary as it was futile; the quiet Queen did not have his almost absent-minded-looking air at all changed, made no leap into talk in response to these efforts of his friend.

"We were talking of Tommy Dodge," said Haskell after a long lull. "You have met him, have you not, Queen?"

"I have evaded him oftener," said Queen.

Haskell laughed.

"Mr. Henry and I were talking of him this evening," said Haskell.

"You're not going to any more, I hope," said Queen.

Haskell laughed a short, joyous laugh of friendship.

"Won't you play?" asked Henry, seeing Haskell eyeing the piano then.

"If you wish," said Queen, and passed to the instrument.

Henry was amazed at the change that came over Queen between the chair on which he had been sitting and the piano-stool. He had been sitting like a drooping lily; and when he said, "If you wish," he became a little more erect, his easy and graceful looseness departed and his graceful modelling showed; he rose, not suddenly, but as with

leisure ; Henry thought it was as if he cast something from him, or took something to him, or both—the man who rose seemed not the man who had been sitting there. Certainly now, thought Henry, not even the undiscerning would hasten to label him effeminate.

And the amazing change went on. As Queen stepped to the piano Henry observed that he had shoulders, and a pliant back. As Queen stretched his hand and arranged the stool our author noticed that the musician had wrists, supple, strong wrists, such, thought he, as one sees in artists and cowboys. Queen sat down squarely, stretched his arms out a little so that his sleeves left his wrists more free.

Then suddenly, sudden now if you will, as if by some last touch of the strong artist's soul within on the visible body, that body that changed at the spirit's dictates, Queen seemed to have changed to a broad-shouldered, large-made man—and then the music began.

It was a music that Henry knew, a favourite music, too, by the way, of that friend of whom he had thought, in this room, once before. Therefore, as it was being played, something in his breast stirred ; and he wished that she was here to hear it rendered so. She would like to be here. She would appreciate this man who played. Yes ; he

was sure she would like Queen and Queen would like her—and then he sat listening.

When the music was over, played as certainly few could play it, Queen sat still and, looking up at a corner of the ceiling, spoke to Haskell over his shoulder. Haskell caught Henry's eye, read his face, saw signs on it that Henry had observed more than the execution of this artist, signed to him to take another chair, pointing also to his own face as he did so and twitching an eye toward Queen. "Look at his face," he signalled.

Henry wondered. But he knew at any rate from that mute aside, that the change on Queen was visible to others, no fancy of his own, and that Haskell had watched to see if he observed it.

As Haskell signed, Queen stirred uneasily—was about to turn.

"Will you play the *March Funèbre*"? asked Haskell, dropping his eyes.

Queen turned to Henry.

"Perhaps you think it a depressing and morbid work?"

"No, neither. I think it one of the most healing of musics."

Queen bowed and looked a moment far off as he turned again to the keys.

Henry gently rose and took a chair by the wall. Queen looked before him, upward a little, over the

piano, at the wall. When he had turned about to the room he had seemed to be again what some might call effeminate; a loose strand of hair was over his high forehead, his face had the suggestion of delicacy. But as he raised his head the strand fell back—and again came that amazing change. His hands fell on the keys and the great ode, as Henry esteemed it, putting it in the same world as Crashaw, and Patmore, and parts of Wordsworth's one ode, had begun.

The music came directly into our author's heart—but he was also interested in Queen, whose face, he observed, had changed, even as he had observed the form change. Before, it had been a face somehow delicate; now it was of a stern cast. And here was no illusion. He glanced to Haskell and their eyes exchanged question and answer: "See it?"—"Yes! It's amazing." Then he averted his gaze from the player and let the music only be his interest.

Time went on, with music, and a little talk, and long pauses of quiet.

"I wondered if you had come to Solway to play at the concert," said Haskell. "I thought it hardly possible, but fancied perhaps you had been moved by considerations that Solway had some claim on you—as you were once long ago—remember?"

"Yes. But Solway has none," said Queen. "No—I was not aware that there was to be a concert in my native town. I just came down to see it and—not all the people in it; one or two. Besides—one can't play to the people of Solway."

"How do you mean?" asked Henry's elevated brows.

"They turn music into something of the devil," said Queen. He turned to Haskell for confirmation.

Haskell nodded, and studied him.

"Not but what I have played in Solway," said Queen, "years ago, once, twice, as a duty. I'm afraid duties are only for the depraved. I'm not depraved, I believe."

"You're one of those for whom impulses are more than duties?" Henry suggested easily.

Queen smiled.

"It's not a doctrine for all men; but for those who generally do their duty the impulse is worth listening to. And I am impelled not to play to Solway," said Queen.

"Can you explain the impulse, or do you just obey without questioning?" asked Henry; and Quarle Queen perceived he was interested, not inquisitive.

"Obey without questioning?" he said and considered. "No; I question till I get answer definite enough to satisfy me. I don't probe to the heart

of the mystery. But I get a sufficient explanation from the impulse when I ask it why. And the reason I don't play to Solway is that, when I played to Solway, my music seemed devilish, somehow. I listened to it, to my own playing, with Solway's ears; and I didn't like it. It was horrific," he said; but the strong word was spoken quietly, his manner again almost languid, some might have said. "I don't ask further than that. I'm not analytic enough," and he looked in our author's eyes sweetly. "Too much of such analysis is apt to make one strained, I think. I won't play to Solway—just as I could conceive a woman saying, if once she went into what is called 'society' in Solway, 'I shall not go back there again.' And I wouldn't ask her to state to me exactly why she made that resolve. I'd know by her voice that she was right; and wouldn't," he smiled, "ask how I could possibly know by her voice. I believe in these things. I live by them."

I had wondered how to give an idea of the peace and strength of this evening, an evening that atoned to our author for the one of which he told Haskell with such horror. I had thought to leave a blank page, not even so much as to note any of the talk. I had thought to leave just a white page, signifying silence and the rest of it. But Laurence Sterne once left an unprinted page (a marbled page) in a

book, and so I may not. It has been done already, the untrue critic in me would say. But this is different, the sensible critic in me would reply. There is a possibility of that looking droll, or somewhat so, and the night was not droll, the judge, summing up, would say to the thirteen good and true critics in me.

You understand—you know that what I want to tell I can only tell by implying—the peace that was in that room, the quiet.

It was as if these three men had come from the same world and would, after this life, return to it, and meet there again. Tommy Dodges did not matter. The silences of Quarle Queen were greater than the sound of Tommy. And, by the way—to hark back—if I had put a blank page in here it would have looked as if, though what Tommy said could be told, what was said and played, and left unsaid at Haskell's, that night, could not be told—or I mean that Solway might "cutely" see *that* could be said—and say it. Oh, dear me! What an evening that must have been, of which one can't say a word! And, oh, dear me—how tangled one's brain does get in trying to be true to oneself and keep from running foul of Solway too!

It struck Henry anon that he was selfish to stay on so long when these old friends might wish to talk of old days alone, and he rose.

"I know your books," said Queen then, not earlier.

"He likes them," said Haskell.

"Yes," said Queen, "if I may say so. I like their atmosphere, their music, their whiteness, if you know what I mean—if I express myself, I mean. The story doesn't interest me much in either; you don't mind me saying that. And your characters are dressed as for the stage—I suppose you must do that. I suppose you have to give your public a story, and dress it. But I have read your books several times; it's the singing bits that come in here and there I like to read; the bits on lawns, with birds and dew and so on, I often turn to in certain moods; they're coloured a bit, a little bit like light opera—but it's good light opera scenery, and it has something else—something of air and sweetness and happiness. I read these bits when I want freshening, when I——"

"When you've met beasts?" suggested Henry, Solway on his back, his black dog.

Queen, considering, twisted his thin-lipped mouth a little.

"I'm not introspective," said he; "it doesn't suit me—I can't just say—but I often like to get the spirit of these parts. I often read snatches of your books, as I say. I like them. There are parts that remind me of Chopin's Nocturnes."

"Thank you," said Henry, and held out his hand and they smiled in each other's eyes.

They never met again.

But——

XXXIII

BLISS HENRY rose up early in the morning and had a cold tub and was seated at his table working while yet the pigeons, wheeling over Solway and over the fields (he noticed them when he paused and looked up and out, seeking a word), were wondrously lit under their wings with a light that told of morning.

The voices of the sparrows that chirped in the High Street told him it was early, for they had a sharp, reverberant sound, echoing from the stone of the old houses like actual tappings of tiny metallic hammers. The far-off rattle of carts on the Carlisle road told him it was morning. The great fields of corn and sun down there, beyond the wakening town, with its blue roofs and new grey-blue smoke that went up with that odd appearance of not being sure about how smoke should go out of a chimney, were of morning. The ridge of the high moors, when he bent and looked sideways up-street, he perceived with joy, blue and shimmering in the pristine light of morning. His heart—it was of eternal morning. He had met a fellow. He had found himself not alone, an exile on this planet;

and joyfully he resumed his writing of the joyous doings of his puppets, doings a little bizarre of his hero, a little dollish of his heroine, but all in the atmosphere of joy that made the "charm" of his work. He worked all day, with just the pauses for meals and short walks and, a little tired, but not at all irritable, looked out on the stars at night before going to bed—content in his life and in his calling.

Next day was a repetition of that one, and in the evening he went again to see Haskell.

"You liked Queen," said Haskell.

"Liked him! Indeed I did," said Henry with that deep cadence in his voice so different from the high note of drawing-room stereotyped appreciation. Had he even said "he was charming" in such a tone the hearer would have known that he meant it.

"He liked you," said Haskell.

"I wonder," said Henry, "if he would come up to my place some evening?"

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; yesterday. He came down chiefly for his girl—they're off together, quietly smiling; there's no church marriage for him—and the rector permitting him to have the church decorated and turned into a reception hall for a morning and

then coming to the marriage breakfast and telling vulgar stories to the knot round him. No; he and she just went quietly off." Haskell laughed.

"What's his girl like?" said Henry, for some reason that he did not probe to put a name on.

"I don't know if you know her—a Miss Robinson."

"Yes; I've met her. Why, she——" and our author paused.

"What?"

"She's the girl I liked so much at the Jones's 'at home.' I thought her the only decent girl there. She's ——" he stuck.

"What?"

"Tommy Dodge spoke of her—said he liked innocent charm too, or something like that. I don't think I told you—he made me so sick. Wouldn't Queen be mad if he knew?"

"I expect Queen, if he heard, would say just: 'Oh, is that so?' and then look away off in that absent-minded fashion of his—and never another word; you wouldn't even know he had been ruffled."

"I'd be mad for the girl's honour, I should think," said Henry. And then: "Dear me! Here am I who know that not what others say of us, not how they look at us matters at all, and that, as Marcus Aurelius said, 'others can talk and act as they

please, I must be an emerald and I must keep my colour,' and yet I go tormenting myself because a mere nothing has said a fatuous, evil thing! Um! I'm glad you tell me more of Queen like this. I'm glad I've met him."

He stood staring before him and his eye lighted on a book—the Jeremy Taylor he had once before handled—an old, clean Jeremy in half-calf, with a spaced title and a rich black type on the old, sacred paper.

"I say," he said, "I think I'll take this, please, and if you'll give me a pen I'll inscribe in it to him."

Haskell gave a bow, the meaning of which Henry could not fathom at the moment, and dipped a pen and handed it to Henry.

> "Quarle Queen. In memory of an Eternal evening—from Bliss Henry,"

wrote Bliss Henry in his quaint caligraphy.

"Will you forward it to him?" he asked in a casual voice.

Haskell went to his desk and took out a little packet.

"That's for you," he said.

It was a book. It was a Marcus Aurelius. He took it a little blankly, wondering. He opened it.

"To Bliss Henry, from Q.Q." he read, "be-

cause of the evening of——" and the date. His eyes were moist and shining when he raised his head.

He thought of Q.Q. and Miss Robinson speeding away together out of Solway.

XXXIV

THE stage setting was very much like that of one of Bliss Henry's own books. There was a house beyond the rhododendron bushes, looking through the trees—the back of the house, with French windows, and lattices thrown back against the blue-grey walls. There were people straying here and there on the lawn rearward, and one saying, "Isn't it a sweetly pretty day?" and another replying, "Isn't it?—prettily sweet."

It was an opportunity for Henry to transmogrify as usual. Here was the setting for one of his books of "charm," with its ineffectual hero loving, and hiding his love; and dreaming quixotic dreams; and doing dear, extravagant things.

"The opalescent sheen of August"—"the light sifted through the feathery trees." Even a butterfly went obligingly past and "rested, breathing with its wings"—sweetly pretty, prettily sweet. Here were men in striped summer things and ladies—"magic penumbra"—"sweet garden scents"—"haze"—"crystal clearness"—"chiffons." Yes, there was a setting here just to his own hand.

Miss Jukes was home again and summer was clearly come, and Bliss Henry had been invited again to "The Laurels."

"Was it Fox snubbed Pitt or Pitt snubbed Fox when the one, or the other, remarked to the other —you know what I mean——" and Miss Jukes laughed gaily and ruffled in her chair.

"Yes; we know," said the colonel; "never mind the dates and the characters, let's have the argument."

"—remarked to the other, or the one, that 'in the society I move in we do not discuss a guest when his back is turned'? I wonder which it was." She turned to Henry.

"I really don't know—I'm not a politician," he apologised.

"Well, it doesn't signify so long as the phrase was said. But really, I must say—do look at Miss Montague. What a picture she makes on the lawn——"

"We must get a sundial," said the colonel, bantering.

"An old one," said Miss Jukes seriously.

They looked at Miss Montague straying gently in her garden frock, her slender hand extended and dropping infinitesimal crumbs on the sward; walking gently, her toe just visible, protruding from the gracefully falling frock. "Peas! Peas!"

she crooned and dropped more crumbs, and the pigeons eyed her sidewise with tilted heads, and picked, and fluttered. She looked round and saw the watchers.

"Aren't they sweet?" she said.

Henry thought she did certainly make a picture —she might have been out of a Harland story— or even out of one of his own!

"I do like Penelope Montague," said Miss Jukes. "She is exquisite, queenly, *spirituelle* and," she added, "she is a very clever girl. She reads——"

"She doesn't smoke," said the colonel, staring before him with that bulgy look that came in his eyes sometimes.

"Smoke! Oh!" cried Miss Jukes.

"What do you say?" called Miss Montague, in a voice of ivory and velvet.

Miss Jukes shook her head—then looked at her brother and saw the glitter.

"Oh," she said, "joking!"

"I thought you called something to me," said Miss Montague.

Henry gave a little smile toward the colonel, whose gaze had a knowing slant toward him.

"*Apropos:* have a cigarette?" said Jukes, and passed his silver case.

Henry sent out gently in the summer a blue feather of smoke and thought how this girl was

she who had spoken of the blackbird dead in spring, which she had laid to rest under a daffodil—a flaunting, golden daffodil to match the yellow of his beak. She came toward them presently, toeing it slowly and swingingly across the lawn and subsided in a vacant chair with a rustle and gentle creak, her frock being of a rustling order and the chair of cane.

Henry had a certain desire to be courteous, or knightly, to this lady of a beautiful phrase.

The accidents, incidental to a garden "at home," were bringing them nearer, which was, after all, but fitting. Had they not already met now and then? Might they not be better friends? He had a desire to talk to this lady of the *belles lettres*, and she gave him the opportunity in the shuffling of the talk. The others dropped out, Jukes forming a quartette for tennis. The click of a croquet mallet sounded from rearward. The pigeons cooed. They found themselves alone.

Miss Montague rose and looked round her on the regal day.

"Let's stroll a bit," she said.

"With pleasure."

So they strolled across the lawn, among the trees, wandered on up the hill beyond the house.

"I do love the view from here," she said. "Shall we sit a little?" and she subsided with her sinuous

grace on a great block of shining, granite-like rock, blue and grey.

After they sat down the birds, that they must have flurried a little by their arrival, again took heart; innumerable chirpings and bars of song shot about in the wood below. From overhead somewhere, in airy isolation, other notes dropped on them, a lark, up there in the sky that dazzled them looking for it, raining its silver rain of song on them as Henry would have phrased it in *The Japanese Fan*, writing also of the epiphanies of blossom and bud in the wood.

"Can you see it?" asked Penelope, looking up, and then quickly down on him, and suspecting that he had been gazing on her instead of into the sky, looking on her neck as her head was raised so. But no, he was blinking upward.

"There!" he said.

"Ah, yes," she said, and looked a moment and was at once content, having found, returning her gaze to earth and swaying the long grass beside the boulder with her toe.

"Do smoke," she said. He saw a light in her eyes, the light that the leading characters in his books saw. Bliss Henry found that he did not like it. It repelled, not drew him.

"I believe Jukes told her," he thought, smiling at thought of that jester, and then let the thought go.

"Do you know Henry Harland's books?" he asked presently.

"Yes—rather! Why do you ask?"

"I don't know."

She looked keenly on him. Oh, she knew him all, absolutely. He was a shy man, she thought. She did not know how a discerning critic had said of Henry: "When you meet men you are great; when you meet clerks and mugwumps you are—eh—shy!" and then laughed at the ill-treated word.

"But I'm not reading fiction just now," she said. "I'm reading biography—it's far more interesting—that's life. Oh, I've been reading a book of love-letters—a delightful anthology. *Can* you understand two people meeting and just seeing each other once or twice and then writing to each other by their Christian names?"

He did not seem interested. He looked round on her and she gleamed on him, and he wondered whither had fled the girl of the blackbird talk.

Penelope, in her grey-blue confection of a material called, Henry believed, *voile*, leant back against the blue-grey granite boulder, gazing down the slope of grass, and seemed to muse a little, like one of his heroines. They could look down into the wood (like his leading man and leading lady) and see the sunlight, that found a way through

the tree-tops, dapple the wood's green and brown carpet (of sparse grass and brown earth) with patina of bright gold. In her grey-blue frock, her dark hair loose above her ears and straying on her brow, her grey eyes meditating, her lips smiling—and he thinking of her as the girl of the phrase about the blackbird dead in spring—Henry found her very engaging, very interesting. A soft wind fanned them; her hair fluttered; Bliss Henry felt, as he would have said in his *The Japanese Fan* or *The Jewelled Snuff-box*, something violent happen in his heart. But it did not affect him, this thing in his heart, as it affected his heroes. It was to him a warning, not a lure. He distinctly did not like it; it seemed to him in the same world with Tommy Dodge.

"Oh—well, I daresay all things are possible," he said; "I don't think I could. I'm very slow with people." He had been a little slow with his reply and she had wondered what was coming, but she had waited, smiling.

He thought how long it had taken him to drop the "Mr." with one of his best friends. But not to appear a contradictor and disagreer he added:

"Perhaps in some cases I could understand it. Yes—it would be unusual, of course," he said non-committally.

She gave a silvery laugh.

"I like unconventional people," she carolled.

He felt that that which had happened once again in his heart was what he had already called "a damned magnetic stir!"

"When do you leave us?" she said, turning her face full on him.

"Very soon now—I'm afraid," he said, staring ahead and speaking firmly.

"Are you glad to go?" she said; and he looked then full on her, so that she was almost startled.

"Well, for some reasons, yes; for others——"

She let her gaze drift from him a little. He was thinking it was not worth while to say how he hated a deal of Solway.

"I like the country," he allowed. "But, oh—well, that's rude."

She had a frown suddenly.

"Oh, go on. I'm not easily offended."

"It's rude," he went on, "to malign the people that are your people, of course—but I don't," he thought her "broad" enough for him to say it, "like Solway people much; that's what I was going to say."

"Certainly their interests are a bit limited," she agreed, one might almost say stiffly—compared with her former graciousness.

"Yes—you must also feel—I mean that I have felt now and then I'd give a deal to talk to some-

body about something apart from—er—superficial party politics among the men, and absolutely nothing, absolutely nothing, with the women," which was putting it very decorously.

"Pretty slow," she said. "I know—and fast too, sometimes," she added, and shot a glance over his well-cut frame. "You know the Jones's, I believe," she hazarded, switching her dress and looking up on him.

"I have visited," he said.

She scrutinised him, more coldly, almost calculatingly.

"You can be honest with me. You don't like them—and their set?"

"I don't. I don't like the people one meets there. You don't play bridge?"

She gave him a wondrous look that made his heart know the "damned magnetic stir" again.

"No," she said. "I say—by the way—what sort of a man is that Mr. Dodge of that set?"

"Dodge?" He made a wry face.

"He seems—eh—an amorous youth," she suggested.

"Amor——" he stuck. Loving! "Well——" the magnetism died. "He's——" he stuck again.

"Vulgar?" she said.

"Yes," he exploded.

"I thought so," she said, and settled at ease again.

"I've never met him. I had suspected that, however." She had the air of dismissing the matter and——

"You find few friends in Solway?" she asked.

"I must not complain, I've introductions I haven't used. I've only seen the people I've bumped into, as it were. But I *will* go the length of saying that I've sometimes, since coming here, felt a desire for occasional confirmation of my ideas!"

"I know," she said; "I'm often lonely here. I've just wanted somebody in the glorious spring, when the sun is drawing the winter out, drop, dropping, from the smoky thatches, and to be able to spout to somebody who would feel it, Thompson's lines about the spring:

> "Spring has come home with her world wandering feet,
> And all things are made young with young desires."

He was very thoughtful suddenly, and she marked his brows and smiled. Really he had turned his light from her on to his dreams. He was thinking: "There is a developing capacity in this girl. I hope, for her sake, that she is strong enough to develop in loneliness."

"It's been very jolly meeting you anyhow," she said. "I like shy men;" she leant sidewise, for a change in position, supporting herself with stiff arm, white fingers spread on the rock.

He reserved his whole thought.

"There's a good deal to be said in their favour," he laughed.

"I certainly see I judged you right from the beginning," she said, looking full on him. "I generally am right at first." She was quite at ease with him, he thought, and he was glad she was. He liked to be at ease with men and women—and know them so with him. Being thus at ease she came out with: "I had a good idea how far one could go with you."

So she had not understood him, having her opinion of men; nor he her, engrossed on his partial portrait of her. He had a gasp at that; but she did not notice the gasp.

He rose and answered fairly promptly, if lightly.

"With me? Oh, I give people my whole self always. It saves mistakes. Often after I've done it I'm sorry, for it hurts sometimes; but I always continue, and what matter hurts like that so long as one is hurt oneself and, by so being hurt, progresses?"

She flicked her dress, rising, and they moved down from the knoll.

She did not know quite what to say and gave another facet to him, one that had a steely glitter in it rather than any light.

"But *does* one progress?" she said.

"Rather!" he cried, as they bent under a spray of apple blossom and came again on the lawn where Jukes now lay smoking a cigarette, his tennis over because of his bad side.

Croquet mallets still sounded; also chatter—but added to their sounds was the more blissful tinkle of crockery being carried out to the garden for tea.

Jukes eyed them, smiling from under his tilted panama. Miss Jukes had a glimpse of them and looked as if she hadn't.

"Tea!" she cried. "Tea, you tennis players."

"I expect," said Miss Montague, "for all your ideas you touch our common humanity somewhere," uttering the words half turned from him, moving away with her engaging, lissom beauty, and all her "possibilities" that he could not get at for the "common humanity." He was sorry—for her. He was a little piqued, for a moment, thinking how she would have her own ideas of him—and they be wrong! Only later he observed that she carried a little chatelaine at her wrist, and that there were pendant ribbons to her hat. He wondered he had not seen the significance of these earlier, and fancied she would have a smiling contempt for a girl who carried a muff instead of a chatelaine. But he dismissed her and his regrets when a whirl of white fantails went overhead and the birds alighted and

strutted on the green sward. He had learnt something from Quarle Queen.

He subsided beside Jukes.

"Have a cigarette?" said Jukes.

"Thanks."

He blew a feather of blue smoke into the summer air and watched it glitter and be dissipated in the bright day.

XXXV

THE next day Bliss Henry could not work. True, the book was near an end, and the whole plan of it still, as always, clear in his mind; but something restrained him; he could not write. Something without himself, or something within, he could not tell which, would persist in checking his hand, damming the flow of the shining, debonair romance with its two central puppets and the few assisting ones.

Had his view-point changed? Had he changed, that his book should seem so *difficult?* Or was it a thought of those who would read, reading him not for what he meant to say but for what they supposed he said, that made him glum? He knew Queen had helped him; he knew Queen had made the puppets live again, and he had been grateful to Queen; but now he had no thought of blaming anyone for the horrific unanimous swoon of his puppets.

He knew only for certain that he was again deterred. At last he gave in, as many writers do, to the laziness, or atrophying spell, or whatever it might be, not vexing himself farther to inquire

whether spell from without, or malady from within checked him, and went away south of the town, across windy moors, along winding roads.

A great chirping in a hedge drew him to it and he looked through. Bright beady eyes peered up at him and he scrutinised closer. The beady eyes still peered up at him; and then he saw a squirm of weasels in a nest of young birds—a hideous, bloody business. He thought it better to retire and give the weasels freedom speedily to finish the business they had begun. It was a hideous sight, the torn, chirping bodies, the chirping destroyers.

"After all," he thought, "why grieve? The weasels, I presume, must live."

But the blue sky over him took a coldness, the fresh fields a hardness, the distant hills an aloofness.

Though he had dismissed his inert puppets, they evidently unable, or unwilling, to help him in finishing charmingly their history, though he had dismissed them, they had been haunting him all the way, as if with rolling, fainting eyes. Now they ceased to haunt. And now something in him, apart from the puppets, found vent; he drew forth his notebook and he wrote there, by the distressful wayside, his haunting (but to some incomprehensible) lyric "You Believed in the Triumph of Passion."

He was gone till tea-time; and after his return with the drafts of that song—and a rest and tea—he went over the criss-crossed lines of it in his notebook, giving it the final shape, the shape it has in his published volume:

"You believed in the triumph of passion;
But I, in the triumph of love,
Who have loved you long time, though my fashion
Of loving a vain thing must prove,
As long as the call of maid's passion
Is stronger than calm of men's love.

"I have wearied you now with my loving;
Cometh not what you thought might appear
Through my love; in the woodlands naught moving,
No piping of Pan drawing near:
Like the vast of the sky, my loving,
Where no clouds, where no passions appear.

"Long since you had ceased prophesying
'You will change in the change of the years.'
And to-day when you turned hence sighing,
Your maiden eyes wet with maid's tears,
'Twas but Hope that had been prophesying,
You knew; these were hopeless tears.

"And I knew that the Hope I had cherished,
Long time, was as vain as your hope,
My soul of no kisses had perished,
Your soul had no door that might ope'
To the cry of my vain love, cherished
As vainly as your mortal hope."

After it was finished he heard his puppets stir and, listening, heard their voices go on again. They had recovered from their unanimous swoon.

"To-morrow," he thought, "I shall attend to them. I have let the day go by and night is coming. I shall do nothing at all to-day to the book. It can rest."

The postman's knock sounded; and May, coming up with the letter, found our author before his open window staring out like a man in a trance. He turned leisurely, absently, and took the letter from the salver.

XXXVI

HIS face brightened at sight of the handwriting, and he opened the letter with a sense of peace. He was now quiet, instead of dazed; at ease, instead of inert; peaceful, instead of distressed; just a slight change—the singing of a bird in a dead landscape, the sun coming out on a city wall—but it meant an immense difference.

There was no leap at heart, no excitement, as he unfolded the letter. It was from that friend, mentioned three times already in this narrative; a reply to his last letter to her, enclosing, besides, a setting to music of the lyric of the birds and the hills, and the rest, that he had sent her shortly after his arrival in the place of peace. She had been a long time about it, she wrote, but from the first reading had always wanted to do it—and here it was, and might it please him. Not that the words required music! They were music.

Henry tried to hum the air. He tried to sing it. But, though he could make music of words, he could not make music of music; so he looked at his watch.

Yes! Haskell would be even now on the point of going home, filing the loose letters, snapping shut the ink-pot. He would go round to Haskell's. Haskell would sing it to him.

He had a strangely elated feeling as he went down High Street, almost deified. A great river of wind, blowing into Solway from over the fields, was in his face. He swung down-hill with head sidewise lowered, to keep his head-gear on. His cheeks rejoiced with the freshness, and the lights of the town had a blurred glitter because of the wind in his eyes.

He passed Tommy Dodge, and Tommy hailed him with :

"Hullo, old chap!"

He passed on.

Tommy ran after him, his showily cut waterproof fluttering about him, and caught Henry's elbow.

"Hullo, old chap! You're not going to cut me, are you? I had no idear you would do that! You ain't goin' to cut me?" and his gay manner overflowed, familiar and ingratiating.

"Yes," said Henry and passed on; and Tommy Dodge stood with the weak vigour oozing out of him and looking oddly like a suit of excellently cut clothes, under a fluttering waterproof, hanging on nothing at all. If you had seen them then you

would only have seen the clothes on Tommy and would not have remembered what Henry's clothes were—only remembered the swinging form clad in glory.

Perhaps it was the freshness of the night that made the thought of going indoors repellent, as if no good would come of being between walls in gaslight. Henry felt a premonition of disappointment and spiritual disaster on the threshold, but flung out his joyousness against it. Such a feeling was not usual on Haskell's threshold. Yet he thought that Haskell, rising to meet him when he was ushered in, seemed a little "off colour," and the brightness of the chamber seemed more glare than brightness.

Haskell, on his side, was glad to see Henry; but a part of him was annoyed, willy-nilly, at the author's triumphant, monopolising dash upon him, like the breeze of the night. He made him welcome, he seated him, he played the fragment, and sang it—but all still in that mood. And he found the music good, too, though he did not quite do it justice—and knew he didn't—wondered if he really tried to. He turned from the piano, nevertheless, much refreshed; but, perhaps a little tired from the day, such is our droll nature, he acted still the mood in which Henry had found him. All of which means that Henry was a fresh

man out of the wind and Haskell a tired man out of a bookshop.

Henry, despite his self-centred mission, and his vigorous arrival, had been aware of Haskell's unwontedly, and then wilfully, unsympathetic deportment, and had almost snatched the music away and said: "No—not in that mood." But the music, in the event, had proved itself greater than a mood.

"By the way," said Haskell, "a lady has been asking for you to-day."

"A lady asking for me! And who, I wonder, may she be?"

"Guess."

"I have no guess."

"A Miss Fox."

"Oh!"

"Aye. You may well say 'Oh!'" Haskell felt for his pipe. "Here you have been taking in Solway for all you are worth—as an outsider; and you have an introduction to two people and never gone to see either of them—for I don't suppose you've been out to Sir Henry's place yet?"

"No—and it was very decent of my publisher to give these introductions. I hope he isn't hurt. But, man! Do you know—I can't tell why—but I do dislike introductions. If I could bump against the people by accident I wouldn't mind; but to

go to see an unknown with a letter of introduction, like a birth certificate or a seaman's discharge papers, well—one's just got to like people then, and they've got to like us; and if they don't, or if we don't, they, or we, have, for the sake of the introducer, to put up with——"

"With we or they!" said Haskell. "Yes; I understand you. But you talk as involvedly as Miss Jukes does when she comes in here and tries to talk with precision. Seriously, however, you should go and see both Miss Fox and Sir Henry Stubbs. Sir Henry has a better library than he has a kennel—which means much in this part of the borders. Miss Fox asked about you to-day; she has heard that you often came in here, she said. She suggested, in her half-cynical, half-smiling way, that if you got lonely you might perhaps remember your introduction. Your publisher has evidently written to her, you see, to look out for you."

"I'd better go at once to call then—or she'll think, when I do turn up, that it's sheer melodramatic loneliness and no courtesy that brings me."

"I'd go, if I were you. You'd like her, I fancy. It's odd, now I think of it, that I've not mentioned her to you before, for I've often thought of her choice of books."

"She buys books?"

"Yes; but don't be falling in love with her now. I'm afraid you're susceptible, Mr. Henry. Miss Montague, if I may say so, I think—well—charmed you a bit, eh? And Miss Fox, I can assure you, is considered mighty charming. I'm afraid there's a bit of dalliance in you." Henry frowned, and Haskell saw and added: "What, for instance, about your musical girl?"

"Musical girl?" said Henry. He had for some cause felt an insolence in the remark, but he thought of Quarle Queen and smiled and said again: "Musical girl? Who is she?"

Haskell turned his arm and flipped the song where it leant on the piano. Henry didn't like the gesture but—

"Oh!" he said, which could mean anything.

And then he stared at Haskell with new eyes and thought he did not like Haskell's expression; so he dismissed from him his breezy dreaminess, focussed his eyes afresh, and looked on Haskell.

"I say," he said; "that's a queer way to talk of her. I bring up the music for you to do me a favour, to play it over for me as I cannot get it for myself. Have I hurt you somehow? You talk like a piqued young lady. If I've hurt you in any way, do say so; don't try to have a dig at me by labelling and limiting a friend and calling her

a musical girl. It's as if you said a musical *box*. Besides, she's not solely a *musical* girl. The appellation is correct, of course—for she is a musical girl. But she's also a lot of other kinds of girl that are worth being." He did not stop there. He went on: "For you to call her a musical girl is less a labelling of *her*, than a criticism of yourself. It is as if you lit a little match that I could see you better," and he did not stop there. He went on: "Your label is, if only you knew, like the paper pinned on a great man's coat-tails by a little rickety gamin in the street."

"Oh!" said Haskell and looked up and glared—then he smiled. But then he bethought him of his mood! Said he:

"You talk as if you disrespect women: 'Talk like a man,' you suggest to me. 'Don't talk like a woman.' Is that it?"

"I meant," said Henry, still smiling sweetly, "'Talk like a person who is not mean, whatever your sex, so to speak,' if you will have it that way!" He gave a little laugh. "There are mean men and there are mean women. But even a mean man, if hurt, does not try to get his own back by little, mean, grinning, polite digs that, *oh, surely you can't take offence at!* No, he doesn't say, 'the musical girl.' A remark like that, my dear sir, is for, as I said, and I say again, with emphasis now, *a*

young lady. Not that it hurts me—only I observe it."

Haskell looked round the room.

"I wonder," said he, "what's wrong with me to-night? You're all right; and I—I seem to be trying to make myself damnably objectionable."

"Would you allow me," suggested Henry, "to open your window?"

Haskell gave a new smile, rose, opened the window, took a great breath of air; then he turned again, after a silence, to his piano:

"This," said he, "is a piece of music that catches me."

He sat down; this time, Henry remarked, in a fashion reminiscent of the way Queen approached the instrument. He stretched his hands to the keys and the music woke—and then his voice:

"I would go back to my own loved hills
When I am dying,
And die to the old, old voice of rills
Where birds are flying,
Flying and crying over the hills."

He finished, and both sat quiet.

"Yes," said Haskell, "the woman—or man," and turning he smiled and bowed, "who wrote the music for these lines—yours, I suppose——?" Henry nodded—"is more than musical. I hope I

didn't hurt you when I—eh—labelled myself as mean, just now ? "

Henry shook his head long and gently, leisurely blowing smoke.

" No ; I assure you you didn't. I would, I may say, had I not known you as a man, have been amused at the appellation. You didn't hurt me except in the way that I was hurt for you. I had a horrible feeling that I was being disappointed in you——"

He paused.

" What are you thinking ? " asked Haskell.

" I'm thinking that Queen would of a surety call me analytic, ridiculously analytic."

" I don't know," said Haskell. " He'd not say *ridiculously* anyhow. He might say analytic, of course. But he'd have felt me petty, I know, without having explained me to myself with such impeccable precision and variety. Quarle Queen would just have gone home and left me to come round. For you were right," said Haskell, " I was in a petty mood and I did say that to hurt you—and I only hurt myself—behaving, as you remarked, like a piqued young lady, *with* a stress to signify the sense in which it is used, meaning a petty, mean, piqued person——"

" Irrespective of sex," said Henry, in a mock declamatory manner.

Haskell sat looking before him through his gleaming glasses.

"I say," he said, "if all men and women had your ideas, felt them strongly, felt your ideas and aims beyond a certain strength——"

"They'd give confirmation of them to each other," said Henry assisting.

"Yes—oh, of course, and—dear me!—yes, that confirmation would help in the speed with which such ideas of life spread! But what I was going to say was that if all felt strongly the ideas you feel they'd cease—well, to procreate, I suppose, one may as well say, and——"

"And what?"

"The race would die out."

Henry sat back easily. "Yes, the body would, perhaps—the visible body might. Yes; I suppose that's logical."

"You suppose it's logical! Why, it's a thought you must have arrived at often, thinking as you do about things—seeing everything as you do." And then more pause, and then quietly now, not as if in face of something terrible, but something peaceful: "The world would cease, man," and he in his turn sat back quiet.

"As most see it to-day, yes. But the more real Eternity is the less real seems Time. The more real the spirit the less real—well—Solway."

He sat thinking and then broke out with Thompson's :

"Where is the land of Luthany,
Where is the tract of Elenore ?
I am bound therefore.

"Pierce thou thy heart to find the key ;
With thee take
Only what none else would keep ;
Learn to dream when thou dost wake,
Learn to wake when thou dost sleep.
Learn to water joy with tears,
Learn from fear to vanquish fears ;
To hope for thou dar'st not despair,
Exult for that thou dar'st not grieve ;
Plough thou the rock until it bear ;
Know, for thou else could'st not believe ;
Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive ;
Die, for none other way can'st live.
When earth and heaven lay down their veil,
And that apocalypse turns thee pale ;
When thy seeing blindeth thee
To what thy fellow-mortals see ;
When their sight to thee is sightless ;
Their living death, their light most lightless ;
Search no more——
Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore."

"Very fine," said Haskell. "Very fine. It moves me. But who can live it ? "

"Live it ? You talk as if it was a strain to live it. Do you think all the pull of the heart is toward the life we know just now—which is

typified in Solway? The eternal pull is—believe me—far stronger than the mortal pull."

"Oh, but you are different from other men."

"In what way?—though I didn't say I was speaking of myself. But in what way?"

"Your tendencies are spiritual."

"Oh! Allow me to tell you, if we are speaking of me *apropos* my ideas—that my tendencies, as you call them, are—or were—toward a careless life, a jingling lyric instead of a sonorous, dignified ode. You remember what Socrates said of himself that way. There is a passage in Flaubert's letters to the same tune, telling all the things he hankered to do and did not do. I don't agree that 'we are what we are, and there ye be,' as a drunk man said to me the other night. The men we look up to and admire have fought hard—and they have fallen; I take that—their falls—as a sign that they did make themselves and were not made. If they had never fallen I might listen to the suggestions of the drunk moraliser that 'we are what we are, and there ye be'; but no—a man has a good deal to do with the making of himself. Wasn't it Holmes said that a man had the making of his mouth if of no other feature? No, sir! I'm not going to go back to the drunk moraliser

in the gutter. That's ancient history, I've passed that. Some may still be disputing in the gutter, but others are up on the heights, 'where Orpheus and where Homer are', and we must go on."

"Where are you going?" asked Haskell heavily.

"I don't quite know. But I know what we've left—and, looking back, I wonder however it had even any interest for men at all."

"I wish I could follow you," said Haskell.

"You believe, then, that I am going on?" said Henry, but I think he knew himself and was not asking for Haskell's expression of belief as an aid, but wondering if Haskell had the capacity to believe that he was going on!

"I do. I believe you may even attain something—some spiritual world. I feel all that you say very deeply;" (Henry thought: "He too, then, may go on.") "but—but—I know," said Haskell slowly, "that I'll just say, 'Oh, what does it matter!' and, despite all my ideas—well, they'll be only ideas."

Henry would fain have helped Haskell farther, but he had a feeling that he must conserve his own energies. He wondered, in an aside of his mind, if

Queen was (after all) selfish to protect himself as he did.

"Perhaps your children will make them more than that," said Henry.

"Children?"

"'Yours,' I said, not 'mine.' Oh," he suddenly rose and looked up and flung abroad his hands, "my children—my children—my children——" he waved his open palms to the open window. The night was far advanced. He could hear the river's voice going on with its eternal song, the tree murmuring of Eternity.

"I know I am at least happy, contented, but I am ashamed when you are here," said Haskell, as though such quiet outbursts of a guest were every-day occurrences. "When you go you leave an echo. I fear that when you go for good you will leave a regret."

"A regret," said Henry, "is very close of kin to an inspiration. Oh, the Day will come. The Day will come."

"But where are you going—where are you going? Are you not just going into the darkness?"

"No—into the Light."

"How do you know?"

"By—for one thing, to mention no deeper and personal ones—looking at Solway, and then looking

away at my dreams. And which is the more real ? " he asked solemnly.

Haskell listened to the silence.

" Your dreams," he said.

XXXVII

BLISS HENRY was tidying his room. Something had happened in his life. Seeds that he had sown in hard soil had shown green shoots; cold winds had threatened the shoots, but they had thriven, and now it was as though the buds were bursting, the bloom showing. The world without seemed fairer, the tree in the little rearward court was a glad green in the well of sunshine against the red-bricked wall opposite. The landscape, seen from his front window, was glittering with sun and freshness.

His airy front room had a cleaner atmosphere, and to make it still more restful and give to it more of the sacred freshness that it pleased him to have around him, home to him being more sanctuary than kennel, he discovered a duster somewhere and dusted his books, polished the glass of the prints and etchings on the walls.

He looked some time at the Helleu of *Lady Looking at the Watteaus at the Louvre*, and then took it down from its place. He had discovered that he had ceased to be charmed by it; he had been given, or had won, a new, or a fuller, light,

by which he had strayed away from it. Yes, it was charming; there was no doubt of that. It was a wonderful and graceful piece of work; but somehow now, when he looked at it, he thought of Miss Montague, and with annoyance. If this *Lady Looking at the Watteaus* were to turn about and look out of the frame he was sure her eyes would have a glitter and stab in them, and she would see he was, not just another admirer of the Watteaus—but a man.

He turned it face down on the table and ran his knife round the brown paper back, eased up the sprigs, removed the print and put it away in a portfolio. Then his eyes fell on the photograph of that girl in London that Haskell had referred to as "the musical girl" and, without any analytical and introspective arguments whatever, he laid it tentatively within the framed mount which had held the Lady of the Watteaus and perceived that it exactly fitted. He set the photograph in, replaced the back, and put the sprigs in again.

The postman's double knock sounded and then anon the maid's tap at his door—if one may call her so.

It was a letter from the girl in London, just the usual kind of letter, with little bits of news of common friends; but it seemed different somehow, both stronger and closer:

"DEAR MR. HENRY,

"Please do not thank me for setting your exquisite verse to music; I have kept you waiting for it a long while but, after receiving your last letter, I have ceased to reproach myself for the delay as, through it, the song came to you when you were most needing it. I am glad to have taken some active part in the dismissing of Solway.

"At the present moment I am furious with the Editress of *Woman's Way*, and to ease my feelings I am going to tell you all the trouble. You will understand so well.

"Do you remember me telling you of a fat, much-ringed woman who sat next to me at the Literary Ladies' Annual Dinner—the woman who, when I said that I did not smoke, asked: 'Too prudish?' and to whom I replied: 'No—not imitative'? Well, it is she who has angered me.

"I had occasion to call at her office, and after we had finished business she worked the conversation round to women writers of the day. I mentioned Vernon Lee, and what do you think the ringed editress said? 'Oh, my dear child—Vernon Lee is so masculine!'

"I think I gasped. Of course I really am to blame, for I should not attempt to discuss

literature with Fleet Street women; they are so snobbish and so dishonest—far more so than the surburban lady who talks of nothing but buttons and lace curtains; and yet, in spite of knowing how foolish it is, whenever I meet anyone who has read I am only too happy to argue, to compare, in fact to rave!

"But Vernon Lee masculine!!! I looked on the fat editress and said: 'I do not understand.' That was a false step. 'You are so young, my love,' she answered. 'Vernon Lee writes just like a man.' 'Oh, well,' I said, 'she does not write like the authoress of *The Hot Widow*, or *The Woman who Wanted To*, or *The Mottled Wame*' (my own invention, by the way; I'm rather proud of it), 'but, in my opinion, it is she who is unwomanly and not Vernon Lee. Besides, we are discussing Art—and Art has no sex.'

"When I mentioned *The Mottled Wame* the editress chipped in with: 'Oh—I've not yet read that, but I believe it is very good.' She reminded me of the woman you once met—to whom you invented first the authors and then the works, all of which she had read.

"I came out of that office bruised and sick; I wanted to cry and I wished, so much, that Solway was near enough to be reached by a

tramcar. However, I went home, read some essays from *Hortus Vitæ* and one or two of your poems and now, after having flung this off my chest at you, I feel convalescent. If you will say : ' Oh, d—— the ringed editress ' for me I shall be quite cured."

Bliss Henry put down the letter, and going over to Helleu's *Cigarette*, took it from the wall, turned it on its face on the table, slit the brown paper back, removed the sprigs, withdrew the print and tore it slowly in pieces, which he put in his waste-paper basket. As he was so employed he thought of the girl who wrote to him, of her library—he saw the books in it : Pater, Yeats, Charles Lamb's letters—he remembered these distinctly. He was now so little affected by outside opinion—whether genuine or insincere—that he did not think there might be those who would jeer at her library and say that literature was older than that, that there were Beowulfs, Maundevilles, Chaucers, Piers Plowmen in the world. He was beyond the bitterness of the academic and the ignorant, emancipated, by his new light, so hardly won, from all pettiness, whether of the scholar's den or the street corner.

He thought of her work on the London press, thought of her playing on her piano—which he had heard once or twice. Well, he preferred to

consider her womanly, rather than to consider that editress a fair specimen of woman—she who sent out the office boy for Daisy Delilah's last novel because "I hear it's naughty." He preferred to look upon her as a typical woman rather than to take, as a standard of woman, either May, or Mrs. Sturge, or that amazing Fleet Street lady, referred to in this letter, or another that he knew (the Editress of *The Blonde Monde*) who did not read at all, but was, instead, a member of the Society of Lady Writers and went to its dinners and put her heels on the table as a sign of her emancipation.

"To hell with them!" he said, quite of his own accord, fervently.

He went to his cupboard and hunted among some old *Studios* till he came to the Sargent number. He thought he remembered having seen—yes—here it was—a reproduction of a pencil sketch of the authoress of *Hortus Vitæ* and *Hauntings* and other eminently womanly, and artistic, and exquisite books—books not bestial.

"What has sex to do with art, anyhow!" quoth he.

The Sargent sketch fitted the frame of the discarded *Cigarette*, and soon Henry was standing in a new room, a quite new room, a room full of the peace he desired, the peace he had come seeking in Solway, the peace he could have found any-

where. After all there were individuals, men and women, in the world, as well as beasts, male and female.

And he was not at all lonely.

XXXVIII

BLISS HENRY laid down his pen—and heard the sparrows at their first chirping in the vacant street. He had come home before midnight and had written on to the end of his book, determined to finish it. And now the task was done and he looked up—and felt strangely, terribly lonely; also faint, as though his hold on corporeal life was maintained by the merest thread. The intense quiet of his room seemed to have a word to say to him; the pale light growing in it was like light in the eyes of one supposed to be dead. The light grew, the pallid, awful light of dawn, that put out the light by which he had worked night-long; and he sat there, utterly and awfully alone, the sparrows' chirpings smiting him.

This last, excessive spurt was due to the fact that of late he had been considering more and more that he was but writing amusing twaddle for the idle, sops to make their futility bearable to them, was little more than a pleasing dauber in a palace of fools, and he wanted to get the book done and then rest. He could not afford to throw

it away. He did not think, indeed, that it was so futile as to deserve such a fate. He knew that he had put into it more than he had put into his earlier books, had written this inspired by a wider and more philosophic view of the destinies of men; there was here more than persiflage. But he wanted, for all that, to finish it—and then rest, rest and forget his quixotic hero and his chiffoned doll, the heroine, leave them there for ever in their charming atmosphere, of which he had so well the knack and the name—and then think about his own life and his own soul.

He wrote "The End," and rose and drew the blind, now yellow with morning, and had a sense of seeing the quiet heart of things. But it was still terrible to hear the first twitters of the first birds, to see the beginning of the day. He felt an immense pity—for what? It seemed to be for all the sons of men and for all their futile ways.

His futile book was written, his book of amusement for those who were still sleeping and snoring. He looked out sadly at the now bursting blue of morning. He had seen sunsets, and nights of stars, since beginning his book. He had ended it with a grey dawn, not sad in itself, but sad to him because of something in his heart. But already the grey was going, blue and pale gold showing. He turned to his table again and wrote the cryptic words:

"In a world in which to see the sunset gives no regret, to see the stars no loneliness, to see the dawn no shame."

He did not understand the words; but they had come from some very deep place in him. He was a changed man somehow, he felt, after writing "The End." There had been a death somewhere; or there had been an opening of the eyes of the blind: he did not know very well what had happened. There had been a voice—either a death-cry or the cry of one who had been blind and had found sight.

And then he came back to life, had an acute sense of reality, was not looking so much at a shifting of scenes on a vacant stage. He read these words again, as if he were not the man who had written them but an onlooker—wondered what they meant. With a tired gesture of his hand over his eyes he dismissed them.

He knew he must now sleep, for he was worn; but he felt he could not sleep till something else was done, and so he took pen again and wrote:

"I have finished the blessed book"—

and then he wrote on:

"Queer, when I finished it I looked up and found it was morning and I felt——"

and he proceeded to tell, as best he could, the effect of that dawn, and then copied the cryptic phrases :

> "'In a world in which to see the sunset gives no regret, to see the stars no loneliness, to see the dawn no shame.' What does it mean? Can you explain it?"

Then he bethought him that he had written no name at beginning of his letter. To whom had he really written it? Something moved in his breast like a bit of Eternity, and he took an envelope and addressed it—to the One Woman that he always turned to in thought, as he turned to himself.

He left the letter on his table to be posted, also a note to Mrs. Sturge requesting that he might be allowed to sleep, be left undisturbed until he rang.

XXXIX

HE called on Sir Henry Stubbs, six miles out of Solway on the high moor, and watched him water his roses that grew in tubs of imported earth, for the moor soil was not friendly to roses, would nourish only squat firs and juniper, bracken and heather; called also on Miss Fox and was entertained graciously in a room with old, exquisite furniture spindling with elegant Chippendale legs on its polished floors and rugs; and old china glowing in its rare old three-cornered cupboards; and was taken through the house by Mr. Fox to see old portraits and old, quaint prints, in hall and on stairs; and into the study to see some Aldines and Elzevirs and quaint Hindoo and Chinese idols in jade-stone, incarnations of Brahma and Vishnoo.

He was gently censured for being so long about revealing his presence, and frankly explained his fear of introductions to "unknowns" when employed on a long piece of work. He had an internal horror all the while that he was a queer visitor, a queer person to be introduced by anyone: for Solway was on his nerves—his work was done—he had now but the desire to be gone—and now that

his work was done he had a feeling of going about in a dream-world. Solway was not real. It did not exist at all. Sitting at tea with these people, so charming, so hospitable, who did not "entertain" like the palm-tub people, but were content to be simply friendly, he heard their voices far off and his own apart from him. Surely he was not really there! He was only looking on!

He had a recollection of being taken round a garden and seeing a gardener at work; of looking at a tennis-court and saying: "No; I don't play tennis"; of hoping, more for his publisher's sake than for his own, as these quiet people were friends of his publisher's, that they would not think he was drunk! They could think him a little queer if they liked. He remembered that authors are often considered queer. Then he heard a voice—it was Miss Fox's now—talking of some great poet; and he answered her with spontaneity. "He has sat in that very chair," he heard her say. He came back to life. Solway seemed real again for a space; no, not Solway; he decided that this house he was in had nothing to do with Solway.

There he sat talking; or sat with tea-cup in hand, listening, and all the while feeling as if he were not here.

His work was done in Solway—such as it was. He should really be gone.

Perhaps somewhat so the aged feel before going. Perhaps somewhat so the aged join in the conversation, move, act occasionally, to tell themselves they are really here, but more to tell those around them so, as it is expected of them to indicate their presence, and old usages die hard.

He felt, too, that he was introduced here as "Bliss Henry, the author." Bliss Henry was a fraud; he wrote charming stories about dear, quixotic men whose dreams did no harm to anyone, because they were only dreams to themselves as well as to the onlookers, were never lived out and so made true; dear, quixotic, lovable, absent-minded men who were more "proposed" to by the heroine in lace than "proposed" to her—and everybody was satisfied.

He was a fraud!

Fancy on the strength of that, on the strength of such twaddle as *The Jewelled Snuff-Box* and *The Japanese Fan*, being introduced to unknowns and sitting down to tea with them and being shown their old china and their old portraits! It was very good of them, and sweet, and kind; but it should not be. Something was wrong in a world that treated so kindly one who could write these merely amusing and distracting books—when such a place as Solway existed. Well—he had not insulted his kind publisher and could truthfully write

to him, after all, that he had called on Sir Henry Stubbs, and on the Foxes, and had found them all charming. He hoped they could as honestly write nicely of him—and said farewell.

Perhaps somewhat thus the aged feel at farewell, going away with a memory of pleasant voices in the room, and tom-tits flying outside the window, and in their hearts a haunting sense of their own loneliness, so that every word is delved for desperately, and every slight gesture dictated—just to show that they are still alive and aware of their neighbours.

When he was really alone, going back to his rooms, he felt better—less lonely. The sky was over him. He thought, very consciously now, of the One Woman and wondered how she fared. He had a feeling that if ever she felt as he did, then he would like to be near her—so that she could run to him and be at peace.

XL

"IT means," she wrote to him in reply to his letter, "if I am not mistaken, that you have been living a little in Eternity, which does not mean that you were intense, or distracted, but calm. You make me think of the end of Bridges' Ode, beginning, 'Assemble all ye maidens,' of the bit about the eternal who live 'the fairest moments of their broken dreams'; and you also remind me of Vernon Lee's words about—I have her book, I shall quote it; it is more a spirit she gives than a fact—but it is the spirit I am speaking of—and the spirit is more than the fact.

"'. . . not the ghost of their everyday, humdrum likeness to ourselves, but the ghost of certain moments of their existence, certain rustlings, and shimmerings of their personality, their waywardness, momentary, transcendent graces or graciousnesses, unaccountable wistfulness and sorrow, certain looks of the face and certain tones of the voice (perhaps none of the steadiest), things that seem to die away into nothing on earth, but which have permeated their old haunts, clung to the statues with the ivy, risen and fallen with the plash of the

fountains, and which now exhale in the breath of the honeysuckle, and murmur in the voice of birds, in the rustle of the leaves and the high, invading grasses.'

"You once mentioned to me something about a Saracen king who, when he lay a-passing, said: 'I have lived three hundred and ten eternal days,' or whatever the number was that he had a record of so surely. I daresay we could always live eternal days, but I gather, though you don't say so, that Solway is not prone to live eternal days. I read it between the lines—you are not happy about Solway. But I do like that bit of your last letter where you broke out with a kind of lyric in it about the *colour* of the place, and the birds wheeling over it.

"As for me—thanks for all your enquiries. I go on quietly . . ."

XLI

BLISS HENRY was going away, back to London. He did not love London; but his work here was done. He would go to see the One Woman when he returned. She was in London. He would be glad to be back there. He loved her.

He saw Drummond in High Street; and Drummond stopped to look in a shop window till Henry passed—looking surreptitiously at the author's passing reflection, but disliking to meet the real man. Drummond was a sentimentalist. Henry saw his back with something of loathing. Would that man have understood him if he said: "I know Love"?

Henry walked on, meeting the factory girls coming from work; and they passed without oglings or asides—some not seeing him, taking him as much for granted now as the crest of hills above the town; others, with the stare of wonder in their eyes, as at a strange thing.

He went to say farewell to Jukes, and found him in his little office with the glass doors, the catalogues and paste-pots round him.

"You have come to say good-bye? Well, if you are going, then I must say a queer thing for me. I want to say that you have meant a lot to me. I once called you a sentimentalist and thought you a comical, quixotic character. Now I don't. You've done me a world of good. You've made me see life with new eyes and I'm grateful——"

"Oh—please——" began Henry.

Jukes had his return to a whimiscal smile.

"Well," he said, "here you are," and opened his desk, "a final offering. It tells what you have made me see." And he drew forth a piece of paper, put on his *pince-nez*, read the words on the paper to himself, then handed it to Bliss Henry with a little bow, the jolly, irrepressible twinkle in his eyes.

Henry stared.

"I'm serious," said Jukes.

On the paper, in the colonel's admirable handwriting, were the words:

> "Bliss Henry was not a sentimentalist. He sought but for what he knew he could get—and having got it was satisfied. This do I believe—George Jukes."

Henry read the odd document and then looked up at Jukes. Jukes took off his *pince-nez* and threw them away from him. They dropped with a

tinkle, swung a little, and then hung plummet-like.

Henry put the paper in his waistcoat pocket.

. . . . . .

Haskell came with him to the train. They walked in silence.

Then :

" All these ideas of yours, *apropos* the symbol of the pendulum and so forth—is not yours a gospel of negation ? " asked Haskell, in a voice that seemed a blending of the dreary and the hopeful.

" Gospel of negation ? I don't know whether a gospel of negation is good or bad ; but I can only tell you the truth, in answer : whatever my gospel is, it is not a gospel of negation." Our author flung up his head, radiant. " It is a gospel—if you call it gospel—of almost hilarious positivism. No ; there is no negation in either my actions or inactions."

" Ah ! You have got to that ! " said Haskell. " Sometimes, thinking of your ideas, I have wondered you did not go mad."

" I used to wonder that myself sometimes. But, you see, if I could not live a real dream, and find it true, I would not have a narcotic dream. There have been minds, seeking as I have sought, that have become unhinged ; but most of that was due to the fact that, not attaining an honest dream-

world, they drugged themselves into a spurious. Better the real world, as one calls it, than that."

"You would not escape from life so?"

"The phrase is to me an error. Those who have failed, have failed, I expect, because they looked at life so, and either took a spurious dream-world or cursed God and died. I have not escaped from Life. I have found—well, found Life. No—it was only the loneliness that made me fear madness might come—but I don't feel lonely now."

Haskell looked at him keenly, to see if there existed the light in his eye that is called the fanatic's light. He saw it not—but looking for it he saw a nameless, unforgettable something that awed him. The whole man was like light; and Haskell was afraid.

The train came in.

"What has Solway done for you?" said Haskell, staring away along the platform.

"I don't know. I go away a little stunned. Solway doesn't seem to exist at all. I wanted to help it—and it has ceased to exist."

"When you recover, then, you will find that Solway has strengthened you—to live with what the kindest in Solway would call your dreams."

Henry stood thoughtful.

"I," he said, "have done nothing for Solway."

"Yes, you have."

"What have I done for Solway?"

"Made some of us at least fair enough to call your ideals, your dreams, *not futilities.*"

Then Henry looked on him and smiled and Haskell was at ease. They shook hands, Haskell (for the guard blew his whistle then) opening the carriage door with his disengaged left hand.

"You have done a great deal for some of us in Solway," Haskell continued, "and the whole, as you once remarked in my hearing" (Henry climbed in and, standing, closed the door), "is composed of the units, and the units will. . . ."

The train pulled out—out—out of Solway.

THE END

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